

CALVARY ENGLISH CHAPEL

Lenten Devotional Guide

INTRODUCTION

God has revealed himself to man throughout history. God appeared to Moses through a burning bush. God appeared to the Israelites as thunder and lightning and a thick cloud at Mount Sinai. God appeared to man in Jesus Christ. And now, God has chosen to reveal himself through the Bible. The season of Lent is 40 days leading up to Easter (excluding Sundays) when Christians devote time to the reading of Scripture and prayer. It is a time of self-examination and reflection.

R.C. Sproul writes, “It takes determination to lay hold of the riches of God’s grace. It takes diligent discipline, devotion to prayer, and a serious reading of Scripture. Nobody gets sanctified with five minutes of Bible reading a day. The Word has to be our meat and drink if we want to grow in grace. We don’t get sanctified by going to church once every six weeks and neglecting corporate worship or fellowship or service. Through all of these means of grace, the Holy Spirit works with us to bring us to spiritual maturity.”

The pastoral staff at CEC has prepared a devotional booklet. It’s our prayer that as we turn to our God in humility, the Holy Spirit will lead us to genuine repentance and the strengthening and renewal of our spirit. We pray the Apostle Peter’s words that you will “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

— *Pastor Michael*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

1 *Week One*

DAY ONE	ISAIAH 58:1–12
DAY TWO	PSALM 51:1–17
DAY THREE	MATTHEW 6:1–6, 16–21

11 *Week Two*

DAY ONE	MARK 1:9–15
DAY TWO	GENESIS 9:8–17
DAY THREE	PSALM 25:1–10
DAY FOUR	1 PETER 3:18–22
DAY FIVE	ISAIAH 42:1–9 AND PSALM 2

23 *Week Three*

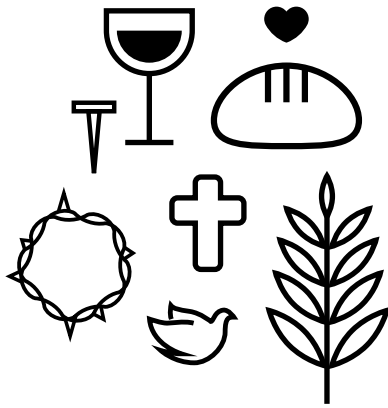
DAY ONE	MARK 8:31–38
DAY TWO	GENESIS 17:1–7, 15–16
DAY THREE	PSALM 22:23–31
DAY FOUR	ROMANS 4:13–25
DAY FIVE	PHILIPPIANS 3:7–14

TABLE OF CONTENTS

33	<i>Week Four</i>	
	DAY ONE	PSALM 19
	DAY TWO	EXODUS 20:1–17
	DAY THREE	1 CORINTHIANS 1:18–25
	DAY FOUR	JOHN 2:13–22
	DAY FIVE	JOHN 1:1–18

45	<i>Week Five</i>	
	DAY ONE	JOHN 3:14–21
	DAY TWO	NUMBERS 21:4–9
	DAY THREE	PSALM 107:1–3, 17–22
	DAY FOUR	EPHESIANS 2:1–10
	DAY FIVE	REVELATION 22:1–3

57	<i>Week Six</i>	
	DAY ONE	JEREMIAH 31:31–34
	DAY TWO	PSALM 119:9–16
	DAY THREE	HEBREWS 5:1–10
	DAY FOUR	JOHN 12:20–33
	DAY FIVE	REVELATION 5:1–14



Week One

¹ “Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins. ² Yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the judgment of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments; they delight to draw near to God. ³ ‘Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?’ Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. ⁴ Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. ⁵ Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the Lord? ⁶ “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? ⁸ Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. ⁹ Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’ If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, ¹⁰ if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. ¹¹ And the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. ¹² And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.

According to this passage, it is possible to fast (i.e., seek God) in a way that will be very displeasing to the Lord and spiritually destructive to ourselves. (We'll see this again in Matthew 6.) God confronts His people about their sins (vv. 1–3). What are His accusations against His people? *Why was their fast not accepted by God?*

Their spiritual disciplines, like fasting, were covered with religious veneer. In other words, they were not sincere. They wanted God to intervene in their lives, they worshipped, they talked about God's nearness, but something was wrong. Their lives did not reflect God's heart; they did not look out for the poor, widows, and hopeless (vv. 6–7).

Fasting is for the purpose of humbling our hearts (v. 5), aligning our hearts with God's, and searching for sins in our lives. But these Israelites used their fasting for self-indulgence, to build credit with God for benefits in the future. If your fasting leaves you harsh toward other people, irritable and contentious (vv. 3–4), then your fasting is not acceptable to God. Hypocrisy is the furthest thing from God. As you devote time to reading God's word and praying during this Lent season, how does this passage help you?

Someone once said, "Monday's work proves Sunday's Worship." How we treat people on Monday is the test of the authenticity of our worship on Sunday. Discuss with your friends or family what this means.

In verses 10–12, what does God promise? How are God's people restored in strength? Obeying God and meeting the needs of the poor will renew one's spirit. Ask God how you and your brothers and sisters around you can carry out this command during this Lent season.

Jesus knew of our hopelessness spiritual condition, our poverty in spirit. Jesus humbled himself and became one of us. He lived a perfect life of obedience so that he could be a

perfect and acceptable offering of sacrifice to God. Jesus was crucified on the cross and bore our sins. Jesus stayed. He became spiritually poor so that we could become spiritually rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). This is the good news. This is the gospel. †

FOR PARENTS Explain to your children the purpose of seeking God (i.e. worship, prayer, word, fasting, etc). Discuss with each other how the family can serve those who are less fortunate. Have the children participate. Close the devotional by praying for the family.

¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! ³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. ⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. ⁶ Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. ⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. ⁹ Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. ¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. ¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. ¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. ¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. ¹⁶ For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. ¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

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This psalm is categorized as a penitential psalm that captures king David's prayer after he was confronted by prophet Nathan regarding his sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:1–12:25). Prayer contains an honest look into man's heart dealing with sin. There is no trace of justifying his sin. Only contrition, a deep awareness of sin, a desperate plea for mercy, and a cry for restoration.

READ Psalm 51:1–17. Study the psalm and ask yourself these questions. What are some effects, physically & spiritually, that sin had on David? How would you summarize godly repentance? Examine the content of David's restoration prayer. What does he ask for?

The variety of words (transgressions, iniquity, sin) used for sin is for poetic reason, as they express the seriousness of sin. The effects of sin can be traced to what David asks for: ‘dirtiness or uncleanness’ (v. 2 “wash,” v. 7, “purge,” “wash,” v. 9, “blot out,” v. 10, “clean heart”), loss of joy (v. 8 “let me hear joy and gladness,” v. 12, “restore to me the joy of your salvation,” v. 14, “my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness,”), and physically ailing (v. 8, “let the bones that you have broke rejoice). Broken fellowship with God due to sin affects believers emotionally, physically, and spiritually. But conviction of sin is always the work of God’s grace, for it leads to Christ.

How would you summarize godly repentance? First, there is acknowledgment of sin. There is no blaming others or circumstances. David emphasizes “I” have transgressed and sinned. There is ownership. David highlights his depravity from birth (v. 5). David is not using his depravity as an excuse for his sin but to heighten the distance between God and himself. Second, David acknowledges God is just to punish (v. 4b, “so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment”). There is affirmation of God’s justice: God is just and man is depraved. Third, what David pleads for is restoration of his fellowship with God (vv. 10–12).

Satan reminds man of their sin in order to drive them to despair. God convicts sin in man in order to drive them to His Son, Jesus Christ. Satan highlights shame & guilt. God shows mercy and restores. It is not due to God not taking sin seriously. He does. Look at the cross!

What does a restoration prayer look like? First, David falls on the mercy of God (v. 1) because only God can forgive. To fall on God’s mercy is to recognize God’s steadfast love and abundance of his mercy. Christians’ return to God is not based on our ‘good’ but God’s goodness. Second, David prays for renewal of joy (vv. 8, 10, 12). A Biblical understanding of joy is not mere emotional

expression. It is a contented resting in God. Biblical joy declares that God is my all in all. Therefore I am okay with punishment as long as the relationship is restored. Sin scorches us most after we receive the grace of forgiveness, not before. The forgiven one realizes the gravity of the sin more when he or she is genuinely repentant and has been forgiven.

God beckons our crying hearts to come to Him in repentance.

This makes our sin forgivable.

What is the evidence or fruit of a forgiven heart? What is the evidence of a Christian who is convicted of sin and restored to the sweetness of God's grace through forgiveness? READ vv. 13–14, “Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.” It is proclaiming to others how great God is. It is worship!

It is missions!

Spend some time in prayer. †

FOR PARENTS Discuss how sinning against others ultimately is sinning against God. How does sin make us feel? Talk about what it means to repent. Praise God for the good news that He doesn't treat as our sins deserve, but forgives and restores us into joy.

¹ “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. ² “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. ⁵ “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you... ¹⁶ “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. ¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Why do you pray? Why do you give to the poor? Why do you fast? These are very important questions to ask ourselves. For according to Jesus’ teaching, it reveals whom we are living for. Reading & studying the Bible, praying, fasting, being generous to the poor are all essential parts of the Christian life.

READ Matthew 6:1-6 & 16-21. What stands out? To whom is Jesus addressing his teachings? As you read & study the passages, look for a common point Jesus is making.

What is the accusation Jesus is making? Some people follow God's commands to be noticed by man (vv. 3, 5, 16). God calls them hypocrites (i.e. actors who wore masks in cinema) pretending to be someone they are not. What is the reward of hypocrites? The applause of men and that's it. They actually get what they were seeking, because they were not seeking God. Do you have the tendency to toot your horn? Do you drop hints to your peers about your spiritually disciplined life? Or do you go out of your way to honor God only? How do you feel when you are not recognized for your labor?

Christians are commanded: when giving to the poor, "do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (v. 3), when praying, "go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret" (v. 6), and when fasting, "anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret" (vv. 17–18). Christians are mandated to be generous to the poor, to fast, and to pray but to do all of them in secret. Christians live for the audience of one: God through Jesus Christ. Christians serve and pray for the Kingdom whether the church, our peers, or the world recognizes us, because our audience is God who sees all things. But living for God alone does not mean "I am right and all are wrong!" Living for God alone leads to love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Why? Because that is what the Holy Spirit is up to, the Holy Spirit who wants to exalt God the Son in everything.

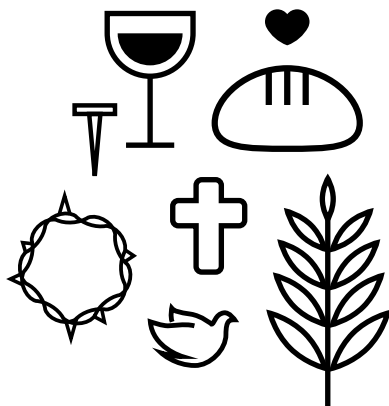
False asceticism (severe self-discipline & avoidance of all forms of indulgence): makes the goal of fasting, praying, reading God's word, etc., the receiving of praise from people (in good standing, wanting personal request). True spiritual disciplines make the goal of fasting, praying, reading God's word, to be the giving of praise to God. In other words, prayer and word is means not the goal.

This is a daily battle for Christians for our hearts are deceptive. We crave attention. Human hearts are mixed with different motivation. What we must strive for is longing to hear the very voice of God saying to us, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:21 & 23).

What is the promise God offers to those who do things to be seen by God alone? “And your Father who see in secret will reward you” (verses 4, 6, 18). What is the reward God promises? “Jesus does not discuss the locale and nature of the reward; but we will not be far from the NT evidence if we understand it to be the ‘both in time and in eternity, both in character and in felicity.’” (D.A. Carson).

Spend some time in prayer. †

FOR PARENTS Discuss the desire to be noticed for the things that we do. Discuss the goal of spiritual disciplines—do we want to receive attention from people or do we want to give praise to God?



Week Two

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” ¹² The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him. ¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

In this passage we see some fascinating connections. Notice that all three members of the Trinity are mentioned at Jesus’ baptism: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (vv. 9–11) Notice also that Jesus was baptized even though he was without sin, meaning he identifies with the sins of his people. Furthermore, notice the words by God the Father regarding the Son, and the part God the Spirit has in descending on Jesus and driving him out into the desert—all of this together points to the united, God-ordained mission that Jesus will undertake to bring the good news to the world: forgiveness of sins through his life and death.

The number forty has many connections to what comes earlier in the Bible. In our passage we see the Spirit driving Jesus out into the wilderness in order for him to be tested for forty days. Another place in Scripture where we see that number is in the forty years the Israelites wandered in the wilderness due to their disobedience. There is a connection here: Jesus comes now and obeys the Father perfectly in the midst of trials and temptations—Jesus does what his people did not and could not do. As you read the gospel accounts, it’ll become clear that Jesus will go on to take upon himself the sins of his people so that what they’re supposed

to bear—the consequences of their sins—will be placed on Jesus instead. †

FOR PARENTS Discuss the significance of Jesus accomplishing what we can't: solving our sin problem. Take some time thinking through this, and give thanks and praise to God for the wonderful gospel.

DAY 2 / GENESIS 9:8–17

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹ “Behold, establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, ¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” ¹² And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³ I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” ¹⁷ God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

What is a covenant? A covenant is a legal agreement between two parties. In the Ancient Near Eastern world, covenants were conditional or bilateral meaning that obligations were binding on both parties for its fulfillment. If either party failed to meet the covenant requirements, the legal agreement was nullified. In such instances, the innocent party was released from obligations and the guilty party was subject to penalties.

What is unique about the Noahic covenant is that God's agreement with Noah wasn't your typical conditional or bilateral covenant. Rather, it was an unconditional or unilateral covenant meaning that obligations were binding on only one party for its fulfillment. In this instance, nothing was required of Noah. And as Noah's offspring, we are beneficiaries of this unconditional, unilateral covenant whereby God promises never again to destroy the earth and its inhabitants by means of a cataclysmic, universal flood (9:11).

As a reminder to Noah and his offspring of God's unwavering commitment to this unconditional, unilateral covenant, God sent a rainbow as a "sign," announcing the good news not only in word but also in picture. Whenever a rainbow appears following a storm, it is God's visible reminder to us of his mercy to preserve life.

A covenant sign is not unique to the Noahic covenant. God often links his covenant to a picture. For instance, in the Abrahamic covenant, God issued circumcision as the sign (17:8–14). In the New covenant, God issued communion as the sign (Lk 22:20). While each of these covenants vary in detail (e.g. Noahic covenant, Abrahamic covenant, Mosaic covenant, Davidic covenant, New covenant), they all affirm one plan of salvation called the "covenant of grace." "There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations" (WCF 7.6).

What is the one underlying message of the “covenant of grace” which the many and varied covenants seek to shed light on? Salvation by a Redeemer who “is the mediator of a new covenant” (Heb 9:15), our Lord Jesus Christ. “God, having out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a ‘covenant of grace’ to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer” (WSC 20). †

FOR PARENTS Explain how God communicates his covenant of grace not only in word but also in picture. Remember to thank God for his mercy that preserves life whenever a rainbow appears following a storm.

DAY 3 / PSALM 25:1–10

¹ To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. ² O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me. ³ Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame; they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. ⁴ Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. ⁵ Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long. ⁶ Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. ⁷ Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O Lord! ⁸ Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. ⁹ He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. ¹⁰ All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

Psalm 25 starts with a confident declaration: “To you, O LORD, I lift my soul. O my God, in you I trust.” It is noteworthy that this expression of trust doesn’t come during a season of great harvest or a time of great joy. Instead we see that the psalmist is troubled. He is surrounded by his enemies (vv. 2-3, 19) and is lonely and afflicted (v. 16).

Why is the psalmist able to confidently express trust in God in the midst of his hardships? Because he belongs to God.

In vv. 6-7 the psalmist asks the LORD to remember his mercy and steadfast love. He asks the LORD not to remember the sins of his youth. Asking the LORD to remember his mercy and steadfast love implies that the LORD had already given it to the psalmist. The psalmist is appealing to what God has already done – the psalmist is appealing to the unconditional salvation that God has already granted him. And it is because God has already shown mercy and steadfast love that he will not remember the sins of the psalmist’s youth. God’s love is unconditional and unchanging. Those who belong to God will never be separated from his love (Romans 8:38-39). God’s mercy and steadfast love are the foundation for the psalmist’s confident trust in him.

We who belong to God are not only able to put our trust in him, we are also able to go to him freely with our needs. The psalmist asks for help against his enemies (vv. 2-3, 19-20), help for his loneliness and affliction (vv. 16-17), and help for his sin (vv. 7, 11, 18). What a privilege to belong to God and know and trust him as our faithful and loving Father. God invites us to bring our needs to him as we learn to trust him.

And as we learn to trust in God, our desires begin to change. We go to God with our specific needs but as we spend time with him, we begin to desire God’s ways and his paths and his truth (vv. 4-5). We learn to pray like our Savior when he prayed, “Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done (Luke 22:42).” Whatever our needs and wants may be, we discover that fully

trusting God means following God's ways and paths. Where do we find God's ways and paths and truths, or to phrase it differently, where do we find God's will for our lives? It is right in front of us: the word of God. The Bible teaches us what God's will is. This is how God "instructs sinners in the way, . . . leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his ways" (vv. 8-10).

May this season of Lent encourage us to spend more time in God's word so we can reflect on God's steadfast love for us in Jesus Christ and know his good, pleasing, and perfect will (Romans 12:2). †

FOR PARENTS Why can we put our trust in God? Because he loved us and will continue to love us perfectly for all of eternity. How do we know what God's will is for our lives? We can know God's will by reading his words in the Bible.

DAY 4 / 1 PETER 3:18-22

18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, 19 in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, 20 because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. 21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

1 Peter was written to believers displaced throughout Asia Minor who were marginalized by the public on account of their faith in Christ. This was not always the case. For the first half of the first century, the church was protected by the Roman empire because Christianity was regarded as another Jewish sect. But everything changed on July 19, AD 64.

On that day, Rome caught fire for three days and three nights consuming everything in its path including ancient temples and historic landmarks much like the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. The citizens of Rome were angry for rumor had it that Nero burned down the city so that he could rebuild it to his liking. To squelch any rumors of his part in the fire, Nero chose a scapegoat and blamed the fire on Christians resulting in widespread persecution. So how were Christians to conduct themselves in the midst of such strong opposition?

Peter's exhortation was to "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation" (2:12). In other words, through their honorable conduct, the watching world will eventually conclude that the allegations circulating in society about them are baseless and cause unbelievers to consider the claims of Christianity.

Having foresight of this opportunity, Peter advised, "always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (3:15). When believers are given a green light to make an apologetic for the hope that they possess, they are called to share the gospel as clearly and coherently as possible.

And what is the gospel? Peter sums up the gospel as follows: "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God" (3:18). The reason Jesus came to the world was to die on the cross in order to make full payment for the moral debt we have incurred on account of

our rebellion against God. And unlike the insufficient temple sacrifices that had to be offered repeatedly in the Old Testament, Jesus' sacrifice was qualitatively different for his death was a once for all sufficient payment! Jesus' death involved a double transfer whereby God accepted the transfer of our unrighteousness credited to Jesus and the transfer of Jesus righteousness credited to us. The result? We who were estranged from God have now been reconciled to God not because of anything we have accomplished but because of what Christ has accomplished in our stead. †

FOR PARENTS Ask your children to explain 1 Peter 3:18 in their own words. Why is our salvation in Jesus Christ secure? Pray together and thank God for the gospel of Jesus Christ!

DAY 5 / ISAIAH 42:1–9 + PSALM 2

ISAIAH 42:1–9

¹ Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. ² He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; ³ a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. ⁴ He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. ⁵ Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: ⁶ "I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, ⁷ to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. ⁸ I am the Lord;

that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. ⁹ Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.”

PSALM 2

¹ Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ² The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, ³ “Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.” ⁴ He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. ⁵ Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, ⁶ “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.” ⁷ I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. ⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. ⁹ You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” ¹⁰ Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. ¹¹ Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. ¹² Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

The concept of kingship is foreign to us (since we live in a republic), and it arouses suspicion (since the most cherished tenet in our country is one’s freedom). Yet, in the Bible kingship plays a big part. From the beginning, humanity lives under the rule of God. They are explicitly created in order to do God’s bidding, and they are accountable to God. And in no way was this oppressive: we get a picture of perfect harmony between mankind and God, with no hint of anything other than pure goodness.

Of course, the picture is very different today. Today we see freedom as paramount, so much so that even God—our maker and the one who holds everything together in the universe—is held at bay so as to keep from intruding into our lives. This struggle against the ultimate king as described in Ps 2 is still true today as it was in the psalmist’s day.

Vv. 1–3 tell us what life is like without God as king. The previous psalm, Ps 1, lays out two ways of living: the way of the righteous—those attentive to God’s instruction—and the way of the wicked—those unwilling to submit to God’s instruction. Ps 1 ends, “⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; ⁶ for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” Then Ps 2 begins, “¹ Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ² The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed” (vv. 1-2). The psalmist ponders on how futile mankind’s rebellions are as they cry out against God’s rule, “³ Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us” (v. 3).

God’s reaction to this is striking (vv. 4–6). He is pictured as laughing and mocking humanity, as he sees everything and is not fooled by anything. He holds the future of the universe in his hands. V. 5 tells of God’s wrath, another striking picture of God. His wrath is real, and it hangs over those who live their lives with themselves as the final authority.

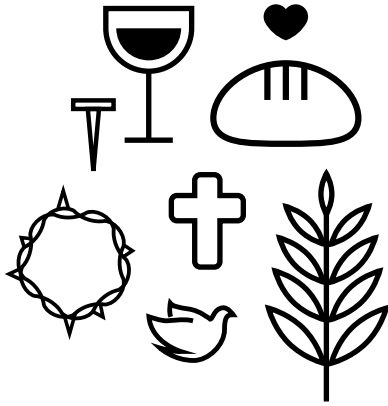
Vv. 7–9 speak of the real king. Notice, the speaker here is the king. V. 7 alludes to the Davidic king and the promise that was made to David’s line (2 Sam 7), but the language here goes way beyond what an earthly king is able to do, pointing to a king far greater than all other kings, the king above all kings. And in the New Testament, we read that someone is called by this similar “Son” language (Matt 3:17). This king is none other than Jesus Christ.

Notice how the psalm concludes (vv. 10–12). The language is paradoxical: serving with fear, rejoicing with trembling. This seems to speak about proper boundary; for instance, rejoicing is experienced within proper bounds. Just as a teenager is given a curfew so that they might be shielded from harm, or a

fish that thrives when in water—not outside it—God’s rules are meant to be life-giving, and we experience joy when we live rightly under God’s loving rule. This is why the psalmist can say in various places that he loves God’s law (e.g., Ps 119:97).

We all have a king in our lives: whatever defines and gives us our sense of worth and identity; someone whose approval we’re after to the degree that it commands our lives. Jesus invites us to instead “put him on,” for he is “gentle and lowly in heart,” and in whom “you will find rest for your soul,” whose yoke is easy, and load (NASB) is light (Matt 11:28–30). †

FOR PARENTS Talk with your children about what a king is. What does it mean that Jesus Christ is our true king? Explain why the gospel changes us and our lives are lived in obedience to Jesus as our response to the gospel.



Week Three

³¹ And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” ³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

It's easy to look back on history with 20/20 vision and look down on Peter's lack of faith when he rebuked Jesus. The reality is that we're cut from the same cloth as Peter. The core of the rebuke is that Peter set his mind on the things of man as opposed to the things of God. In particular, it seems that Peter was elevating comfort and safety over the guaranteed suffering that comes from following Jesus.

Do we understand that following Jesus comes at a cost? Do our lives reflect the cost that Jesus describes as taking up our cross and following him? Do we share in his sufferings? Or are we caught up in gaining the whole world? Are we caught up in our personal, worldly agendas?

The gospel (good news) is that although we don't gain the world, we gain eternity with Christ. Although we will face persecution, reviling, and all kinds of disgrace for Christ's sake, God will wipe away every tear from our eyes and dwell with us intimately as we enjoy him forever (Revelation 21). May this season of Lent be a time when we meditate on the suffering of our savior and ask ourselves whether we are setting our minds on the things of God rather than the things of man. †

FOR PARENTS What does following Jesus look like in our family? What are some sacrifices that we make as a family because of Jesus?

¹ When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, ² that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.” ³ Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, ⁴ “Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. ⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. ⁷ And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you... ¹⁵ And God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. ¹⁶ I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”

Genesis 16 contains the narrative of Abram having a son Ishmael through Hagar, Sarai’s servant. At the start of chapter 17, we are told that Abram is now 99 years old. It has been 13 years since the birth of Ishmael. God comes to Abram again (chapters 13 & 15) and reaffirms His covenant of (1) many descendants (verses 5-6) and (2) an everlasting covenant with his descendants (verse 7). Sarai will be the mother of many descendants (verses 15-16). And God’s covenant is fulfilled. One man becomes a nation.

When Abram was 75 years old, God had promised that a child would one day be born to him. Abram and Sarai, lacking patience, tried to fulfill God’s promise through Hagar. Ishmael’s and Isaac’s narratives are an illustration of salvation by works versus salvation by grace (Galatians 4:21-31). The impossible has taken place—a 99-year-old man and a 90-year-old woman had a baby. But what is impossible with men is possible with God. God keeps his promise in God’s time, not ours. †

FOR PARENTS What are you facing today that seems impossible? Even hopeless? Take heart! Look to the cross and see what God has done to save spiritually barren people like you. God took the initiative and provided for salvation. Nothing is impossible with God.

DAY 3 / PSALM 22:23–31

²³ You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! ²⁴ For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him. ²⁵ From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will perform before those who fear him. ²⁶ The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord! May your hearts live forever! ²⁷ All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. ²⁸ For kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations. ²⁹ All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, even the one who could not keep himself alive. ³⁰ Posterity shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation; ³¹ they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it.

Psalm 22 opens with the phrase, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” This is the phrase that Jesus quoted on the cross in Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34 as he bore the penalty for our sin. Some Christians read Psalm 22 as a prophetic writing specifically about Jesus. However, it may be better to read Psalm 22 as a general song of grief (lament) for the innocent sufferer, and recognize how the New Testament, especially Matthew 27:35, 39, 46 and Hebrews 2:12, uses this psalm to identify Jesus as the ultimate innocent sufferer. It is the sinless, innocent Jesus who is the answer to the psalmist’s cry for salvation in verses 19–21.

Verses 22–31 of this Psalm outline our response to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The magnitude of Christ’s love and sacrifice for us leads us to the very ordinary response of praising Jesus and telling of his name to all the world. Jesus Christ, the innocent sufferer, saved us from the ultimate suffering of a life separated from God. Let’s reflect on Jesus’ sacrifice and love today and respond in worship. †

FOR PARENTS Discuss our sinfulness (original sin) and the innocence of Jesus Christ. Discuss how Jesus suffered in our place. How should we respond to the good news of Jesus saving us from an eternity separated from God?

¹³ For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. ¹⁶ That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ¹⁷ as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸ In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” ¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. ²⁰ No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” ²³ But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, ²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Paul levels a devastating and damning indictment against the entire human race arguing that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (3:23). Because Adam is the representative head of the human race, we have all inherited the original sin of Adam, including his guilt and corruption. Consequently, Paul declares, “none is righteous, no, not one” (3:10)... “for by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin” (3:20).

In light of this universal indictment, what hope is there for us to stand before God on the day of judgment? There would be

none except for the fact that God has chosen to mercifully intervene in our behalf. “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it – the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe” (3:21-22). Because of Christ’s redemption accomplished, we are put in right standing with God not on account of an inherent righteousness merited by us through works, but on account of an alien righteousness credited to us through faith.

To substantiate the gospel of justification by faith alone, Paul looks back on God’s gracious dealings with Abraham. And what does Paul conclude? That God’s promise to Abraham “did not come through (observing) the law but through the righteousness of (that comes by) faith” (4:13).

In Genesis 15, God established an unconditional, unilateral covenant with Abraham. Although Abraham knew he was impotent and Sarah was barren, God told Abraham, “‘Look toward the heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them,’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:4-6).

What was “counted to him as righteousness?” (4:22). Abraham’s belief in the LORD. The promise of Abraham did not come “through (observing) the law” but “through the righteousness of (that comes by) faith” (4:13).

What is faith? The reformers concluded that faith consists of three necessary elements: 1. Knowledge (“believing that”), 2. Agreement (“believing in”), and 3. Trust (“believing on”). What is paramount is not the degree of faith, but the object of faith. And just as God credited righteousness to Abraham who believed in the LORD so Paul argues that “it (Christ’s righteousness) will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead

Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (4:23-24). †

FOR PARENTS Explain that salvation is not based upon our righteousness but based upon Christ’s righteousness credited to us by faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord.

DAY 5 / PHILIPPIANS 3:7-14

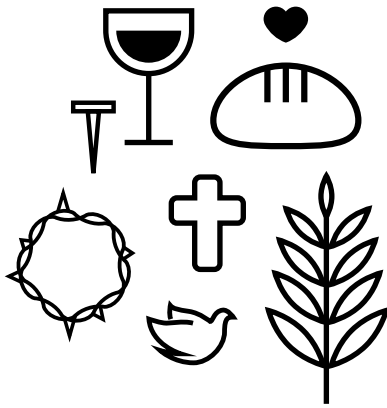
7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Notice the upending that happens in this passage. In verses 4–6, Paul lists all the outward signs of devotion that he, and others like him, considered to be spiritual gains. But Paul now sees all these outward signs of devotion as loss compared to the worth of knowing Christ Jesus. It is the gospel of Jesus that is gain. Jesus’ dying on the cross was a symbol of loss for many: how could the Messiah die like a common criminal? But Paul sees what might be perceived as loss to be the greatest gain.

There is no way we can earn our way to God. It is impossible for finite beings to reach the infinite, perfect God, no matter how many good works we might be able to accumulate in a life time. But praise God that the infinite reached down to the finite and saved us.

The gospel shifts our paradigm. The gospel shows us that there is no gain in trying to earn our righteousness with good works. The gospel shows us that it is only through the great loss of Jesus dying on the cross that we can truly gain righteousness because Jesus’ righteousness is now ours. †

FOR PARENTS Discuss the idea of doing good things to be right with God and how that is impossible. Discuss the gospel of God reaching down to save us.



Week Four

¹ The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. ² Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. ³ There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. ⁴ Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun, ⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. ⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat. ⁷ The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; ⁸ the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; ⁹ the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. ¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. ¹¹ Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. ¹² Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. ¹³ Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me!

Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. ¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Many have heard the words of Psalm 19, probably in a chorus somewhere in church. In fact, there is a song called “Psalm 19”! When we read this psalm we’re struck by the grandeur of who God is—in his creation and in his holy Word. First, we see creation shouting God’s praises. But notice the paradox: their voice “goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world” (v. 4). But creation can’t speak as one who has an audible voice (v. 3). As result people can—and do—misinterpret nature (for example, regarding how the world began to exist and

where it's headed). But the Bible tells us straightforwardly that nature exists to glorify God and to show who he is (vv. 1–2).

The psalmist goes on to speak of all the benefits of God's law (vv.7–11). Often when we hear "law," we react negatively, as it sounds like rules that are forced upon us. But as we read how the psalmist describes God's law, it makes sense that the Hebrew word torah is sometimes translated "law" but can also be translated "instruction." Moreover, if God is the loving, heavenly father that he is, then his laws can be equated with "loving instruction" for those who know him through Christ. With that understanding, we're able to look a little deeper into the heart of our heavenly Father.

And in the fullness of time, God sent his one and only son, who is the truest embodiment of God's laws, in order to save mankind. God the Son preached repentance from sin and called for trust in him—his life, sacrificial death, and resurrection—so that those who look to him as their Savior and Lord can have eternal life. †

FOR PARENTS In what ways do our lives reflect the glory of God? What does it say about God that he would show himself to us through nature generally, then specifically through his Word, and going even as far as to show himself most fully through his Son?

¹ And God spoke all these words, saying, ² “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ³ “You shall have no other gods before me. ⁴ “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. ⁷ “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. ⁸ “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. ¹² “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. ¹³ “You shall not murder. ¹⁴ “You shall not commit adultery. ¹⁵ “You shall not steal. ¹⁶ “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. ¹⁷ “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

Please read and think about the meaning of each commandment.

The Ten Commandments are given by God to his people through Moses. The Ten Commandments are commonly understood as being divided into two groups. The first through fourth commandments about how people should view God. The fifth through tenth commandments about how people should relate to each other. This is why Jesus summarizes God's laws into two commands: "Love God with all your heart and with your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37) and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39).

God's commandments are about love. Because God is love and Christians are loved by God, we are called to love one other (1 John 4:11).

How can we know what God's love is like? The answer is found in the Ten Commandments. They show us what God is like, and they spell out the meaning of love. True love involves faithfulness, truthfulness, trustworthiness, and contentment. These are all dimensions of God's character, and that is why they are the dimension of love. God is love, and he calls us to pursue a life that reflects His character. That's why He gave us the Ten Commandments. They show us what God is like and spell out the meaning of love. The reason we should not commit adultery is that God is faithful. The reason for not bearing false witness is that God speaks the truth. The reason for not coveting is that God is content in Himself. That is what God is like, and since you were created in His image, this is the life for which you were made. (Colin S. Smith, *The 10 Greatest Struggles of Your Life*)

But how can I love like this? The key to Christian life is the gospel. "And God spoke all these words, saying, 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.'" (Exodus 20:1) Like the Israelites were delivered from the bondage of slavery in the powerful nation of

Egypt, Christians were delivered from the bondage of Satan and sin. All by God's grace.

The Ten Commandments convict us of our sins. We become aware of the helplessness and hopelessness of our spiritual condition. But the gospel of Jesus Christ lifts the burden (Matthew 10:25-30). Now, obedience to the Ten Commandments becomes a way to please our Father. †

FOR PARENTS Which commandment/s is/are more challenging to you? Why do you think so? Ask God for more grace.

DAY 3 / 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-25

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." ²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Paul is writing to the church of Corinth, to believers who were living in a thriving, hedonistic trade city, deeply influenced by Greek philosophy and wisdom. Just prior to this passage, Paul exhorts the church to be united in mind and judgment (v. 10)

instead of being divided and quarrelsome, following this or that person and “eloquent wisdom.” He reminds the readers that the word of the cross is instead “folly” to those who are perishing. While the “Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom” (v. 22), the cross of Christ will seem weak and foolish to them, a “stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.”

But Christ is other. The “signs” are not weaker forms of God’s power; secular “wisdom” is not a lesser form of godly wisdom. They are from the world. But Christ crucified is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Christ crucified is completely the work of God and God only, for “in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom.”

Paul’s writing is a warning against being like the world, pursuing signs of power or secular wisdom and persuasion. We, too, live in an age that praises the powerful and the learned. But Christ does not fit that mold! By secular standards, then and now, Christ will seem weak and foolish. But to us who are being saved, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Hallelujah! And in resting in and reflecting on Christ’s brokenness, his humility, his obedience, his sacrifice on the cross, we know the transforming power of the cross in our lives. †

FOR PARENTS Talk together about how God loved us so much to save us through his Son, Jesus. Discuss how the world will not understand our faith, but it is God’s unearned gift to us that we believe. Pray together for a friend, neighbor, or family member who does not yet know God.

¹³ The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. ¹⁵ And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the moneychangers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸ So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body. ²² When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

The temple in the time of Jesus was first and foremost a place to meet with God. Yet as Jesus enters the outer court of the temple, he finds a "house of trade" instead. In response, Jesus drives the animal merchants out and pours out the coins of the money changers. His actions seem harsh and uncharacteristic of the kind and compassionate nature of Jesus, but he was motivated by a great concern to maintain the purity and holiness of his Father's house. The people of God who came to find a place of rest and solitude were likely distracted by animal noises and jingling coins as they sought to encounter God through prayer and repentance. He condemned them not necessarily for their business practices but rather for their inability to recognize that the temple area was primarily a place for worship.

We should ask ourselves if we are more aligned with the animal merchants and money changers or with those who earnestly seek to experience God. Often times when we come to church, and even more so when we are at home or at work, there are so many

thoughts running through our minds and motivations wrestling in our hearts. It is challenging to genuinely seek the presence of God and give him the dignity and respect that he deserves. We must follow Jesus' example and fight to make worship the central focus in our lives.

In response to clearing the temple, Jesus' authority was questioned by Jewish leaders. When asked to provide a sign to prove that his actions were credible, Jesus claims that he could raise up the temple that took years and years to build in just three days. Fortunately, John gives us insight that Jesus was referring to his body rather than the physical temple structure. Here we see that Jesus is the true temple and fulfills all that the temple represented. In the temple, sacrifices were made to atone for people's sins so they could be accepted by God. These bloody sacrifices were replaced by the ultimate sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and his death and resurrection reconciled our broken relationship with God. Christ is the center of all worship, and because of what Christ has done for us, we respond in obedience and with a life devoted to him. †

FOR PARENTS Discuss Jesus' reaction to the merchants and how you would have responded in a similar situation. How can we genuinely meet with God on a daily basis? What are ways in which we can rightly worship God through our lives?

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. ⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) ¹⁶ For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.

The Bible tells us that God made us in his image (Gen 1:26–27), meaning he gave us the highest dignity and worth. But we know that after the Fall this image was tarnished, and humanity spiraled downward into deeper and deeper sin. Romans 1 tells us that human beings bury truths about God and worship created things. What should be done to rebels like these?

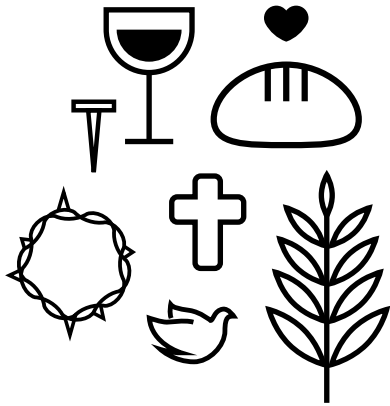
John’s gospel begins by showing the plight of the world: the world and everything in it was made through Christ (v. 10), yet the very ones who were made by him rejected him (v. 11). Imagine coming home one day, and instead of your family welcoming you, they fail to even acknowledge you. Say this continues and, over time, your family not only fails to acknowledge your presence but begins to hate you. And one day they tell you they want nothing to do with you. What an awful situation that would be!

Jesus faced a similar situation, but on a grander scale. Notice the world’s rejection and failure to recognize the one through whom it were made (vv. 10–11)! Instead of welcome, Jesus was met with the opposite. Jesus’ own family didn’t even believe him at one point (Jn 7:5). This is how much darkness was—and still is—in mankind. So, when we come to John 3:16 and John writes, “For God loved the world in this way, that he gave his only Son” (my translation), we need to keep in mind that in no way was Christ’s coming due to the world’s lovableness; instead, what’s astounding is that despite the world’s darkness God still sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice (and to show the magnitude of his love), so that “to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (v. 13). What grace and mercy—and privilege—that God would call us his children!

Finally, notice the description of Jesus’ descent: the Word existed in the beginning, in relationship with God, and the Word was God. As God in human form, the Son could have been called

anything. Yet, John calls Jesus the “Word,” understandably so since “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known” (my emphasis, v. 18), in the sense that Jesus explains and interprets who God is. Since Scripture attests to Jesus’ life, the Bible is essential to our knowledge of God today. †

FOR PARENTS Talk together about the gospel—what is the good news about Jesus? Why is it good news? Thank God for sending Jesus who came to give us the right to become children of God. Also, let’s be reminded of the importance of the Bible—it gives us evidence and knowledge of what Jesus did.



Week Five

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

What does a serpent in the wilderness have anything to do with the Son of Man or Jesus? That might be the first question you ask when reading this passage. The background comes from Numbers 21:4-9, which is the passage you will read for tomorrow’s devotional. What is important to know for our passage today is that while God’s people were journeying through the wilderness, Moses was instructed by God to put a bronze serpent on a pole and lift it up for the people to see. Those who looked at it were saved, and those who did not died. Therefore, the analogy John makes is that just as those who gazed upon the serpent were saved, we who look at and have faith in Jesus who was lifted up on the cross will receive eternal life.

This is further captured in one of the most famous verses in the entire bible, John 3:16. It is often memorized and provides a summary of the gospel message. Because it is so well known, we can often take this verse for granted. But we should not be so quick to recite this verse without taking some time to internalize

what it is saying. The truth that God loved the entire world was actually an amazing statement that would have shocked the Jews because it was believed that God only loved Israel. But because of God's love for the world demonstrated through the sacrifice of his own son, anyone who believes in him will receive eternal life. If we honestly assess ourselves, we will quickly come to the conclusion that this is not something that we or the world deserved. There is not a day that goes by where we do not sin, and it would be fair for God to punish and judge us. But God's purposes for sending his Son, Jesus Christ, was not to condemn the world but to save it (v. 17). The one who died and took our place on the cross was not just anyone but none other than the Son of God, Jesus Christ. He alone is worthy of our praise and worship. †

FOR PARENTS Discuss what the gospel means to you. Take some time to present the gospel message to your children by explaining John 3:16-17. Do your best to also memorize both of these verses as a family.

⁴ From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. ⁵ And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." ⁶ Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. ⁷ And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸ And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." ⁹ So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

If you remember yesterday's passage (John 3), Jesus uses the image of the serpent that Moses lifted in the wilderness as an image of himself being lifted up. There is a double meaning behind being lifted up—Jesus is literally lifted up on the cross to die, but Jesus is also lifted up back into life.

In Numbers 21 the Israelites complain against God and Moses. God sends fiery serpents and many people die. We need to read this passage in light of the larger context of Numbers where God has told the Israelites that they will wander in the wilderness until the unbelieving generation dies off because they did not trust that God would give them the promised land. As we read through the narrative in Numbers we see that the previous generation is dying off through various means including the fiery serpents from today's passage. This is a matter of God's justice and judgment being fulfilled.

And yet, in the midst of God's justice, we see his rich mercy displayed through the bronze serpent that was lifted up on a pole. Those who looked upon it would live. We can grasp the gospel connection here. Because we are born in sin and continue to walk in sin, we are dead. We are separated from God. Our destiny, as sinners, is eternal separation from God. Yet God chose to give us life through Jesus Christ. Praise God that he has given us eyes to see our savior so that we might live! †

FOR PARENTS Discuss the gospel of God choosing to give us life through Jesus Christ. God is perfectly just and perfectly merciful. On the cross Jesus experienced the perfect justice of God that we were to pay which translates to God's perfect mercy given to us.

¹ Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! ² Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble ³ and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south... ¹⁷ Some were fools through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities suffered affliction; ¹⁸ they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death. ¹⁹ Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. ²⁰ He sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction. ²¹ Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! ²² And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of his deeds in songs of joy!

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What are you thankful for? Sometimes we don't know unless we stop and take time to think about this. Then many things come to mind: family, friends, and opportunities. And pretty soon we realize there are many smaller, everyday things we can be thankful for—things like health, having clothes (that we often get to pick out!), a safe place to live, and having food. Christians are reminded that every good gift comes from God (Jas 1:17), and for God's people there are special reasons to thank God. This psalm gives us a glimpse.

In this psalm the people are called to give thanks to God. Notice the reasons: “for he is good” (v. 1a). Just like with acknowledging what we can be thankful for, if we stop and reflect, we'll find that God has always been good to us, even when the situation didn't seem like it. Notice also that God's enduring, “steadfast love” (v. 1b)—to forgive people who have been unfaithful to him—is another reason for giving thanks to God. Notice, also, how God has “redeemed” his people (v. 2). We are most familiar with how God redeemed his people from Egyptian slavery in the Exodus.

Read the rest of the psalm to see how God redeemed his people from different situations. As one example, vv. 17-22 tell of people who brought on suffering in their lives because of their own foolishness and sins. They then cry out to God for help, and God hears and heals them! Therefore, this group of people has a reason to thank God, and they are called to indeed do so.

Christians know that there is a paramount reason, even more than all the above, for giving God thanks. They have been bought back (“redeemed”) with the highest cost possible, the precious blood of Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1:18-19). Therefore, Christians always have something to thank God about: their salvation in Jesus Christ. †

FOR PARENTS Discuss what we are thankful for in life. Then make the connection, through the fact that God is good and that he gives us things to enjoy, that most of all we thank God for saving us. And because our salvation is secure in Jesus Christ, we can always thank and praise God for our salvation.

¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

The most striking aspect of this passage is the transformation that happens to a sinner from verse 1 all the way to verse 10. The linking word here in this section, as well as the book of Ephesians, is the word “walk” found in verse 1 and 10 (the ESV translation preserves the original word here). We were dead in the trespasses and sins in which we once “walked.” We followed Satan and all he stands for. We were children of wrath. But God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ. It is by grace that we have been saved, through faith. And so now that we are saved, we are God’s workmanship created to “walk” in good works that God prepared for us to do.

Notice the transformation. Before salvation in Christ we were walking in trespasses and sins. That is, all our choices were leading us away from God. And we could try to do all types of things to get right with God, but they were meaningless because we were still walking in sin. But God made us alive. And now that we are alive with Christ, we can walk in the good works that we were created to do.

Praise God that there is no striving to earn God’s favor! God has given us his favor through Jesus Christ. And he has given us the privilege to walk in newness and live the life he created us to live. †

FOR PARENTS Discuss the transformation that happens when we are saved. Emphasize that salvation is God’s work (vv. 8-9). Discuss verse 10 together.

¹ Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.

At the lowest point of John's life, God gave him a glorious vision concerning the world not as it is but as it will one day be. The book of Revelations is John's best attempt at conveying in words the vision he had been given concerning the destiny that awaits God's people. Just as this vision was given to encourage John to persevere in faith so Revelations has been written to encourage us to persevere in faith despite how unfavorable our circumstances may appear.

According to John, everything that is wrong with our world will one day be a thing of the past. We will hear and see what John heard and saw. "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (21:2-4).

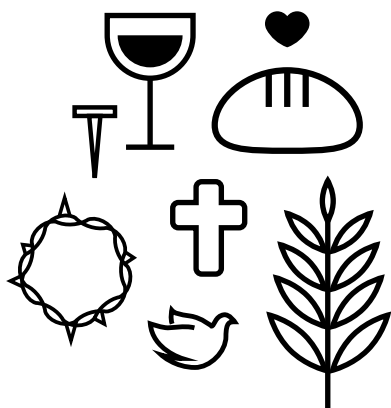
Revelation 22 speaks of "the river of the water of life...flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb" (22:1). This river which is described as "bright as crystal" is reminiscent of the river in the garden of Eden. "A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden... where there is gold...bdellium and onyx stone" (Gen 2:10-12).

Like the original garden of Eden in Genesis 2, Revelations 22 speaks of our future dwelling as a fertile garden where winter never comes. It will be a place where "the tree of life" will always bear fruit twelve months out of the year and its leaves will have healing properties for all. The language is reminiscent of Ezekiel 47. "And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing" (Eze 47:12).

What is noticeably absent in this new garden is the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It is nowhere to be found. Why? Because this new garden will never be touched by evil again. “No longer will there be anything accursed but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him” (Rev 22:3).

God will one day transform paradise lost into paradise regained and we will live in God’s presence for eternity “to glorify God and enjoy him forever” (WSC 1). †

FOR PARENTS Ask your children to share what makes them sad. Then ask them to imagine what life will be like when Christ returns and transforms paradise lost into paradise restored. Pray “Come, Lord Jesus!”



Week Six

³¹ “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

When the newly-delivered Israelites entered into a covenant (a special promise) with God, they vowed together, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do” (Exodus 19:8). They heard God’s commands and promised obedience. However, such obedience was not possible! Their promise to obey would be broken again and again. Though God was a husband to them, leading them “by the hand” from their enslavement in Egypt, they soon broke the covenant in disobedience, as did the generations after them.

In light of the continued disobedience of God’s people, the prophet Jeremiah’s message to the nation of Judah was often one of judgment. He was called “to pluck up and break down, to destroy and to overthrow.” But God also called Jeremiah “to build and to plant” (Jeremiah 1:10), delivering the ultimate message of hope—that God himself would make a new covenant with his people, dependent not on the obedience of people, but the work of God. This new covenant rests utterly on God’s willingness to make and accept the perfect atoning sacrifice of his son Jesus Christ for the forgiving and forgetting of our sins. And God promises, “I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” He promises to do a transformative work in his people, putting

his law within them and on their hearts, thereby radically changing their relationship with Himself and even with one another (v. 34).

†

FOR PARENTS Because God loves us, he wants to have a close relationship with his people, a relationship that would never be broken. In the Bible, we learn that people made special promises with God, called covenants. They promised to always love and obey God. If we promised to always love and obey God, do you think we could keep that promise always and forever? No, we couldn't and they couldn't either. But if God promised to love us, always and forever, would He be able to keep his promise? Yes! God could keep His promise always and forever! Thank God for sending his Son Jesus to take away our sins so that we can be God's people forever.

9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. 10 With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! 11 I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. 12 Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes! 13 With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth.

14 In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches.

15 I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. 16 I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.

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In verse 10, the psalmist writes, “With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments!” Psalm 119 reminds us that our relationship with God cannot be separated from our relationship with His Word. In yesterday’s reading, God promised, “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” Somehow, our relationship with God is dynamically linked with God’s word in us.

Jesus echoed this same idea when He taught, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). While Jesus’s life, death and resurrection do indeed make the believer right with God, it does not end there. Right relationship with God is not simply a position or state of being before the Lord. Psalm 119 reminds us that by God’s work of salvation and regeneration, our relationship is one of love, delight, and purposeful seeking— all of which are tied to knowing and obeying the Word of God. †

FOR PARENTS

Talk together about ways that we can store up God’s word in our hearts. As a family, how might you help one another do this? Why is it good for us to remember, think about, talk about and delight in God’s word?

¹ For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. ³ Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. ⁴ And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. ⁵ So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”; ⁶ as he says also in another place, “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.” ⁷ In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. ⁸ Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. ⁹ And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, ¹⁰ being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

The Israelites had a high priest who was called by God to serve in a two-fold manner: to act on their behalf before the Lord and to minister in solidarity with God’s people. God appointed His Son, Jesus, to be and become the ultimate and eternal high priest for His people. The author of Hebrews makes it clear that Jesus did not exalt himself, but it was God the Father who called and ultimately glorified him.

This calling enters time and place and history in the physical life of Jesus, “the days of his flesh.” It is in the outworking of Jesus’s obedience that He is made perfect or complete. That is not to say that Jesus was somehow disobedient or imperfect by any means! But authentic obedience is a practiced obedience, and the earthly life of Jesus shows that he, too, was beset with human weakness, yet was gloriously without sin—thanks be to God! (Hebrews 4:15) And his perfect obedience culminated in his atoning death on the cross.

God's glorious plan of salvation through his Son, Jesus, was not some abstract, cosmic change in human fate. His salvation was worked out in the bodily life of Christ, in the reality of his loud cries and tears, and in the reality of Jesus's suffering and death. Yet it was through Christ's death and resurrection that God would glorify Himself. And through Christ's ultimate victory over sin and death, He became our unique, perfect, and eternal high priest, "the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him" (v. 9). Hallelujah! †

FOR PARENTS Brainstorm together—what are some things that we have in common with Jesus when he lived on the earth? Now try to think about things that are unique about Jesus, that are only true of Him. Would anyone else have been able to die to take away our sins? Praise God for making a way through Jesus to save His people. Praise Jesus for being perfectly obedient to God his Father.

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. ²¹ So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²² Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. ²⁷ “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹ The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” ³⁰ Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

Often times, Jesus’ death on the cross is characterized by suffering and shame. We associate the cross with pain and isolation as he carried the weight of all our sins. While this is true, this passage tells us that his death should also be equally characterized by his glory. When the Greeks, who refer to the Gentiles, approach Jesus, he answers them by saying that “the hour” or the time for Jesus’ death, resurrection, and exaltation is near. But this “hour” is also the time when he will be glorified (v. 23). This means that Jesus is not only glorified after his death when he is resurrected but that he is glorified even when he is suffering on the cross. His love, self-sacrifice, and obedience are on the fully display for the world to see when he is lifted up and nailed to the cross. Like the grain of wheat that dies to produce a

great harvest, Jesus's death also provides life for those who believe in him. He is glorified on the cross because his death means others might live. This new life is not just for a specific group of people such as the Jews, but for all people, including you and I (v. 32).

What is also noteworthy is that Jesus is not the only one who is expected to die to himself. Although his death was unique in the life that it would bring, Jesus' followers are also expected to experience a kind of death that results in their own eternal life (v. 25). This is not talking about physical death but a denial of our own self-interests for the interests of God that comes when we put our faith in Jesus Christ and trust him as our Lord and Savior. It means that we are given a love for God that is far beyond a love for ourselves. Our highest priority is to worship God and bring him glory in everything that we do as we make sacrifices and carry our cross daily. This is not the easiest path, but it is one that we do not journey through alone knowing that our Savior carried his cross for our sake. Praise Jesus and all glory to God! †

FOR PARENTS Discuss what comes to mind when thinking about Jesus' death on the cross. Explain why this shouldn't be something that only makes us feel sad but also produces thankfulness and worship. Also, what does Jesus mean when he says that someone who hates his life will keep it for eternal life (v. 25)? In what ways can we carry our cross daily?

¹ Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. ² And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" ³ And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, ⁴ and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. ⁵ And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." ⁶ And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, ¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." ¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, ¹² saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" ¹³ And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" ¹⁴ And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Although John had reason to believe that God had abandoned him—having been exiled “on the island called Patmos” (1:9)—nothing was further from the truth. During his exile, John was given a magnificent vision of heaven where God was seated on the throne.

In this vision, John saw a “scroll” held in God’s right hand. The scroll was full “written within and on the back” suggesting that nothing could be added to it. In addition, the scroll was guarded with “seven seals” suggesting that nothing could be taken from it. It contained the complete and immutable decree of God.

Yet who could disclose and execute God’s plan? When John realized that no angelic being (“no one in heaven”), no living being (“or on earth”), and no deceased being (“or under the earth”) was able to open the scroll, he became distressed until he witnessed the one who is worthy: “The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David” (5:5).

In Genesis, Jacob announced that his sons would praise Judah and bow down before him “as a lion” (Gen 49:9). Recognizing Jesus as the fulfillment, the author of Hebrews points out that “our Lord was descended from Judah” (Heb 7:14).

“The Root of David” is likewise another reference to Jesus being the long-awaited heir to David’s throne as promised in the Davidic covenant. God promised David, “I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son” (2 Sam 7:12-16).

But rather than seeing a conquering Lion, John saw “a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain” (5:6). The contrasting images of a conquering Lion and a sacrificial Lamb wonderfully depicts the person and work of Christ.

Because Jesus has “ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” by his blood, “every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea” is falling down and declaring aloud, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”

This vision of heaven is reminder to us that God is on the throne despite appearances to the contrary. This glorious vision is an exhortation to turn our attention away from our immediate concerns and to fix our gaze upon Jesus our sacrificial Redeemer and conquering King! †

FOR PARENTS How do the contrasting images of a Lion and a Lamb accurately depict the person and work of Christ? Take time to thank Jesus for being our sacrificial Redeemer and conquering King!



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