GOD SAID,

Hearing His Word, Living His Promises



Hearing His Word, Living His Promises

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PREFACE

God is the Creator of the universe, but He did not stop there. He stays involved in His creation and especially His children. He loves us and has made promises to us that are recorded in His Word. Knowing, believing, and expecting the promises of God brings hope. There is an acronym of H.O.P.E. that should be foundational in our lives:

Holding

On to God's

Promises

Every day

"For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory."
2 Corinthians 1:20

LESSON ONE

AMEN

PASTOR JOSH COMBS

1. When you pray, what is normally the last word you say?

_____

I usually end with, “In Jesus name, amen.” I guess I am so trained that if I do not say “amen” at the end of a prayer, it is like forgetting to send a text. I wrote it, and it sounded good, but I forgot to hit send! Of course, that is a bit silly. God is not waiting for the word amen at the end of your prayer or mine to confirm receipt.

However, the word amen gets thrown around a lot. Sometimes, people yell it out during a sermon: “Amen, preacher!” If you are not familiar with the word or that type of verbal response in a gathering, you might think someone is having an outburst or was just startled awake. If you grew up more liturgical (Lutheran, Catholic, Episcopal), you might have sung the word, “Aaaaahhhhhhhhhhhh-mmmmmm mmeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeennnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn.”

2. Did you grow up using the word amen? If so, how?

_____

_____

_____

Amen is a religious word, but what does amen even mean? “Amen is a transliterated form of a Hebrew word that means ‘to confirm’ or ‘to establish.’ Jews regularly declared ‘amen’ in response to prayers or statements with which they agreed.”[1] Amen means surely, or so be it. It is “a response indicating agreement and commitment.”[2]

3. How is amen used in the following verses?

- Deuteronomy 27:15-26

_____

_____

_____

1 The NIV Application Commentary, Scott Hafemann, page 85
2 Murray J. Harris in Expositors, page 326, note 20

- 1 Chronicles 16:36

_____
_____
_____

- Nehemiah 5:13; 8:6

_____
_____
_____

- Psalm 106:48

_____
_____
_____

Amen is a word used to express agreement with a statement and promise to obey or uphold an agreement.

Read Isaiah 65:16. Twice, the phrase ***"God of truth"*** is used. It is literally translated as "God of Amen."

4. What does "God of Amen" mean? (See Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:18)

_____
_____
_____

Can I get an amen?

In 2 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul writes, ***"It is through him that we utter our Amen to God."*** However, in Corinth, there was not much agreement or amen-ing going on. Paul's relationship with the Christians in Corinth was strained. Because Paul had to change his travel plans, his critics in Corinth used this as an opportunity to question whether Paul's word could be trusted. If Paul's word was not trustworthy, what about his teaching? Then they started to ask: Could God be depended on? Was God faithful to His Word? Does

God make good on His promises? These suspicions about Paul were casting doubts on God's promises.

5. Has a spiritual leader or influence in your life broken their promises and made you question God's dependability? If so, how did that affect you and your faith?

_____

_____

_____

It is within this situation that Paul makes a wonderful statement about the reliability of his words grounded on the dependability of God's promises. He writes, ***"For all the promises of God find their Yes in him"*** (2 Corinthians 1:20). The ***"Him"*** of verse 20 is ***"the Son of God, Jesus Christ"*** from verse 19.

I love how the King James Version translates this passage, ***"For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us."*** Eugene Peterson does a nice paraphrase in The Message, "Whatever God has promised gets stamped with the Yes of Jesus. In him, this is what we preach and pray, the great Amen, God's Yes and our Yes together, gloriously evident."

The Corinthians were wondering if Paul and the God he preached about was dependable. Paul essentially says, "Just look at Jesus!" The proof that the God that is the "God of Amen" is Jesus. He is the stamp, the yes, the affirmation, the establishment, the agreement, the so be it, and the Amen of God. John in Revelation 3:14 records Jesus words as, ***"The words of the Amen."***

In our terms, we might wonder if God had ever had His fingers crossed behind His back when He made a promise. Has God made a promise that He could not fulfill? God has made some huge promises that seem beyond fulfilling. We may doubt God's ability to follow through on those promises. Jesus is the ***"Yes"*** of every one of those promises. Christ on the cross is proof that God's promises, every single one of them, are reliable.

6. List the promise:

- Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:15)

_____
_____
_____

- Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; Galatians 3:7-9)

_____
_____
_____

- David (2 Samuel 7:16)

_____
_____
_____

- Simeon (Luke 2:25-32)

_____
_____
_____

Sometimes promises are agreements that we call covenants.

Just think about the time between promise made and promise kept. In some cases, it is more than a millennium! God's promises did not fail. Jesus is the ***"Yes"*** (the fulfillment) of every single one of those promises, "meaning they all come true, in Christ. They are all made possible by His person and work."[3] Jesus is God's Amen.

And all God's people said…amen?

Like Moses (in Deuteronomy) or Nehemiah, Paul is challenging the people to state their agreement and commitment to Jesus. He wants them to echo God's amen with an amen of their own. He is asking

3 John MacArthur, 2 Corinthians Commentary, page 44

them, “Do you say amen to Jesus?” Ultimately their issue was not with Paul and his travel plans, but with Christ.

Once the church at Corinth gave their yes and amen to Jesus, God would be glorified (verse 20), and unity would be restored to the church. The faith of the Corinthian church in the reliability of God’s promises would be strengthened.

Throughout this series, we will look at a bunch of God’s promises. Jesus is the key, the Amen, to those promises. In the Old Testament, when the people were commanded to obey the Lord, they responded with amen as a way of affirming their commitment to obedience and, on a basic level, an affirmation that they heard the command. Jesus is God’s Amen to us. We must say amen to Him.

Some of the promises in this book are only for those who have uttered their amen to Jesus. Other promises are for everyone.

7. Have you said yes and amen to the truth of Jesus?

_____
_____
_____

8. If so, when was that amen moment?

_____
_____
_____

NOTES

the grip

DEVOTION #1 - DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

"I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one." John 10:28-30

My Uncle Bob was bigger than life. Although he was a Ford executive, he owned a farm. He and my cousin, Bobby, would throw bales of hay around and move equipment by hand. I learned a concept called Farm Strong. Uncle Bob had huge hands, and I remember two things from those mighty mitts. First, when shaking his hand, go deep into his palm, or he will crush my hand (he would even roll my pinky finger). I remember being on my knees saying (or screaming), "Uncle!" Second, I remember him offering me candy if I could pry it out of his hands. I was hopeless.

This is the image I envision when I read John 10:29, ***"No one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."*** God promises to hold on to believers. Once we accept Christ as Savior, God takes a grip on us. At that moment, He promises to hold on through other passages as well.

Romans 8:38-39 says, ***"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** He gives an all-inclusive list to emphasize that He has a grip on us, and He will not let go!

This promise is also expressed in His statement, ***"I will never leave you nor forsake you"*** (Hebrews 13:5). There is nothing I can do to lose my salvation. I did not do anything to get saved – Jesus did all the work on the cross. Therefore, there is nothing I can do to lose it. Our salvation always needs to be about Jesus. I am not the focal point; it must be Jesus.

This is an important promise. Satan wants to get us to take our eyes off of Jesus and place them anywhere else. He tries to tempt us through discouragement, self-doubt, and uncertainty. As believers, we will fall, but that does not mean He gives up on us. Once we gave our life to the Lord, we were ***"sealed for the day of redemption"*** by the Holy Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:30). He stamped it, sealed it, and that settled it.

the rainbow

DEVOTION #2 - SIERRA COMBS

I vividly remember a moment, many years ago, when a rainbow stopped me in my tracks, overtook me with awe and wonder, and left me weeping both tears of sadness and tears of hope. Many months prior, I had lost what would have been my second child. My first pregnancy had gone so smoothly that I never had any worries about it the second time, and yet, just as I was entering my second trimester, our new source of life had come to its end. I was left completely heartbroken over the loss of my child and the loss of a dream. There were so many months of crying out to the Lord and asking why it had to be like this, ridden with anxiety and sadness. It was a difficult time, but life found a way, and not long after, the Lord blessed us with another child. While the sadness was exchanged for joy, the anxiety seemed uncontrollable. I was so afraid that the same thing was going to happen again.

Then, one day, as I was driving down the freeway, I looked out of my rain-soaked windshield and saw the most stunning double rainbow I have ever seen. While all rainbows are beautiful, this one was intense in its full colors, spread wide across the sky, and was not just one but two! It was spectacular. At that moment, I felt an overwhelming sense of peace that could only come from the Holy Spirit. While I already knew it, I was suddenly overcome with the fact that God is faithful. He will never leave me, and He is a promise-keeper. I could not know how things would turn out with my pregnancy, but I knew at that moment that whatever happened, it was all going to be okay, and I could trust Him. Over a decade later, I can still see that rainbow in my mind, and it still makes me smile. While rainbows are indeed awe-inspiring, they are so much more!

They are a stunning reminder of God's covenant with humanity, reminding us of His mercy, faithfulness, and promises even in the middle of life's toughest storms.

Most people have heard the story of Noah and his ark. The Bible tells us that in the days of Noah, God was grieved by the wickedness of humanity, and He decided to send a great flood to cover the Earth and destroy everything and everyone. However, there was one man, Noah, who found favor in the eyes of God, and God chose to spare his life and use him to start fresh. He told Noah to build a boat for himself, his family, and representative pairs of every living creature. Once the ark was complete, God sealed them in, and the rain started to fall. Not only did the rain fall down, but the water gushed up from the Earth. Everything in the entire world, outside of that ark, was destroyed. Not only did it pour down rain for 40 days and nights, but it took 150 days for the waters to recede enough for Noah, his family, and all the animals to be able to exit the boat and get on to their new task of repopulating the Earth. It was then that God made a promise to Noah and every future living creature: ***"Then God said, 'I am giving you a sign of my covenant with you and with all living creatures, for all generations to come. I have placed my rainbow in the clouds. It is the sign of my covenant with you and with all the earth. When I send clouds over the earth, the rainbow will appear in the clouds, and I will remember my covenant with you and with all living creatures. Never again will the floodwaters destroy all life'"*** (Genesis 9:12-15, NLT).

What a comfort that rainbow must have been for Noah and his family. While they knew that God had just done a great deal in order to save them, it still must have been a frightening ordeal. They exited the boat to an entirely new Earth. Everyone they had ever met, aside from each other, was dead. There were now only eight people on the entire planet! Their towns and their homes were destroyed. The landscape was completely different. Among all the other new things, now a new weather pattern called rain had entered the mix. I imagine that the first rainfall after the flood would have been quite

traumatic. Yet, after the rain came the rainbow, and every time Noah saw that bow, he would be reminded of God's faithfulness, mercy, and the promise of salvation amidst judgment. As He did with Noah and the ark, God offers us salvation through Jesus Christ, the "ark of salvation." Just as God sealed the boat doors shut, keeping Noah and his family safely inside, He also seals in those who put their trust in Him.

Thousands of years later, the rainbow covenant still stands, magnificently reminding us of our amazing promise-keeping God. Its bright and vibrant colors remind us that the world is still under His care, and it remains a sign of hope and new beginnings against the backdrop of a storm. It has been 14 years since my special rainbow moment, and yet its effects will stay with me forever. I went on to have a healthy pregnancy and deliver the most incredible daughter, my little "rainbow baby," who brought so much joy and hope after such deep grief and loss. Life's storms did not stay away long, and I would go on to lose two more babies over the next decade, followed by one last rainbow baby. In both sunshine and rain, God remains faithful through it all. Whatever storm you are currently facing, rest assured that a rainbow is not far behind!

declared assurance

DEVOTION #3 - GRANT GRIMES

"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." Isaiah 41:10

What is a promise? A promise is a declaration of assurance that someone will or will not do something. In Isaiah, God promises to strengthen and help us in a specific way. His first command is, ***"Do not fear,"*** directed at the Israelites. This reminds me of childhood when a teacher presented a problem without an immediate solution. Unlike those situations, God not only commands us to be courageous and fearless, but promises to empower us to do so. J.R.R. Tolkien once said, "It is not the strength of the body that counts, but the strength of the spirit." Those who have accepted Jesus as Savior are promised a spirit of ***"power and love and self-control"*** (2 Timothy 1:7). God has assured His children that He will give them courage. By definition, He declares to all who believe in the Gospel that He will strengthen, help, and uphold us.

Isaiah speaks of the ***"righteous right hand"*** to emphasize God's powerful support and assistance to the believer. Throughout Scripture, from the trials faced by the Israelites in Isaiah's time to Paul writing to Timothy in the New Testament, the command, ***"Do not fear,"*** remains consistent. God's promise has spanned over 700 years, demonstrating His enduring assurance.

In times of doubt and despair, the Lord reminds us that He is with us, giving us courage and carrying us when our own strength falters. When facing today's challenges, remember that God is in complete

control, no matter what. In our weakness and discouragement, He is made strong. God recognizes and wants us to seek His help; we cannot do life without Him. Like a father caring for his child's needs, our Heavenly Father seeks to care for His children.

There are many times in life when fear paralyzes us. Just last year, we had to rush my father to the hospital, and fear gripped me at the moment. I had no control over the situation and could not see the outcome in the emergency room. I was not obeying God's command to not be fearful. Many times in life, fear controls us because we cannot control our situations, and the damage this lack of faith causes is catastrophic. In these moments, we must remember God's beautiful promise: the Lord will provide courage and uphold us. He will bring us to honor and glory beside Him on the right hand. It is a promise that not only gives us courage but elevates us to the highest place we can be.

God gives new mercies each day

DEVOTION #4 - CATHY STORY

How often do you think about what you think about? It is kind of a funny question, right? Yet, in all honesty, how often do you analyze, put in check, or realign your own thoughts? Our minds are wonderful and complex, and something I will not pretend to have an in-depth understanding of, but also something that, when left unchecked, can spiral completely out of control!

Maybe you have caught yourself running a situation through your mind over and over again, trying to figure it out. Maybe you make up how a conversation will or will not go, trying to come up with the perfect words to say. Maybe you replay everything you did or said and wonder what in the world you were thinking. Maybe you turn to the Word of God and listen to what He says. Although I am not sure that should be a maybe, it should be a definitely, certainly, or without a doubt.

Lamentations 3:21 writes, ***"But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope."*** That statement, ***"But this I call to mind,"*** is saying, I remembered this, or my mind was drawn back to something. So, what was it that was remembered and brought this hope? Lamentations 3:22-23 continues on to say, ***"The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."***

Coming back to your thought patterns, how often do you ***"call to mind"*** the promises of God? We can be filled with hope when we recall that God's love and mercies are new every single day. They do not run out. He does not get tired of us, and we cannot return to

the well too many times. We can rest in knowing that day in and day out, our God has been faithful. He is faithful, and he will continue to be faithful.

Next time you find your thoughts trying to spin out of control, try to ***"call to mind"*** the promises of God and let your hope be renewed. If you do not yet feel like you know God's Word enough to always recall it to mind right now, there are other steps you can take. Write God's promises down and post them around your house, or type a note on your phone that you can open up and read. Until God's Words and His promises become so ingrained in your mind that you recall them by memory, take steps to recall them by sight.

empathy

DEVOTION #5 - STEPHEN BILLINGS

Can you think of a time when you have said or thought, “Am I the only one going through this struggle?” or “Am I the only one who is having a hard time in life?”

I am willing to bet that each of us has said or thought both of these statements. It is natural to think this way, but both of these statements are lies. However, God has promised us that His Son, Jesus, can sympathize with us. Hebrews 4:15 shares, ***“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”***

God’s Word proclaims that we are not alone in our struggles. God is not only with us, and knows when times are getting hard, but is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. Meaning, God comforts and cares for us as we go through the struggles of life because He knows exactly what it is like to have struggles in life.

As a young parent of two little boys, I find myself in situations where I just do not know what to do. An example is when my wife and I were potty training our two-year-old. As many of you have probably experienced, there are many ups and downs. There are times when you think that potty training will never end, and you just need someone to sympathize. Not only can friends and family care for us, but most importantly, God can and does as well.

God can sympathize with us because He sent His one and only Son, Jesus, to earth. While on earth, Jesus went through various

trials, tribulations, and temptations. He set an example for us in how to deal with the struggles of life because He lived a perfect life. He never sinned, creating a way to take away all of our sins and past mistakes to be forgiven by dying on the cross and rising again.

The next time you are going through a struggle and feel alone, know that our Heavenly Father knows exactly what we are going through. Go to Him and ask for encouragement and care. God will provide the care that we need because He loves us and knows exactly what we are going through.

comfort

DEVOTION #6 - JILL OSMON

There are a lot of differing views of what God actually promises us. We see cultural concepts creep in when we look at what God promises us. If we view 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 through the lens of the world, it would tell you that God will not let pain, affliction, or sadness come to His people. That if we love God, He will shape a life for us that is free of pain, heartache, affliction, and anything we would not like.

It does not stop there. It is not just the world that looks at this through a different lens, but we have a whole religious belief system that teaches that it is not God's will for us to suffer. They explain that if you are suffering, you did not pray enough or follow God's Word closely enough.

Both of these views are distorted views of the promises of God. Let us look at 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 closely, ***"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."***

What sticks out to you? Do you see it? God will comfort us (Hallelujah!), but He comforts us from affliction. That means that we will have affliction in our lives. That is really difficult to process sometimes. It is difficult when you are serving Him, and He allows sickness, death, tragedy, or trauma to happen, and you feel like God has abandoned you. We do not feel comforted. We feel alone and betrayed.

I have lived in that valley before, facing a cancer diagnosis and not understanding why God would allow it to happen. I have served Him so faithfully, and yet He has allowed this to happen. In my pain and sorrow, I have to choose what lens I see it through. Do I see it as the world sees it? The mindset that since God allowed this, He must have broken a promise, abandoned me, or that He does not even exist.

The other choice is to remember Lamentations 3:21-23, ***"But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."***

I cling to His actual promises found all over the Bible. Psalm 119:50 says, ***"This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life."*** In Psalm 119:76, we read, ***"Let your steadfast love comfort me according to your promise to your servant."***

I believe that God is Who He says He is, and I can trust Him to give me comfort in my afflictions. It is comfort from the God of the universe, the God who created all things, and from the King of kings. That is the comfort that will wrap me in His unwavering arms and give me a peace that surpasses all understanding. I would choose that comfort over everything the world has to offer, to claim that promise.

The idea of God giving us comfort does not end when we receive it, but He calls us to action. God, in His infinite wisdom, knows that those who walk a difficult road are in a unique position to offer an earthly comfort that is born out of heavenly comfort. Do not keep it to yourself. In 2 Corinthians 1:4, it says, ***"So that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."*** We know how to offer comfort because we received it from the ultimate Comforter.

When I meet other cancer patients and survivors, I know the intimate struggles of that journey. I can empathize with the loneliness, fear,

and pain. I can take the comfort I received from God's promise and offer a piece of that to help point them to the ultimate comfort given by God.

I do not know the affliction you have endured throughout your life, but I know you have them. If you feel alone and lost in the affliction, let me give you good news. God promises you He will comfort you. Let that be an encouragement because I know that God is Who He says He is, and He will always fulfill His promises.

If you have received God's comfort, are you looking for opportunities to share that comfort? Tell people that God is there in their afflictions, and He will give them the comfort that they seek. It is a supernatural comfort that can only be from Him.

incredible

DEVOTION #7 - PASTOR CHUCK LINDSEY

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." Romans 8:28, NKJV

One of the most incredible promises from God is that He will work every situation out for our good.

When I say incredible, I mean it in the truest sense of the word. It is hard to believe it. When we really consider what that means, it hardly seems like it can be true. Does He mean every single thing? Will every little thing that happens work out for my personal good? What kind of power is needed to turn each situation into good? What kind of focus and effort is needed to control everything so that every person can affect everything for good? What kind of wisdom is required to understand everything and know exactly what is needed to bring about good in every situation? What kind of attention must be given to my individual life to bring about this good, what feels like a million random circumstances? It is a shocking promise! If it is true, it is nothing short of a miracle accomplished 1,000 times and even 10,000 times a day.

It is true. Our God really does ***"work"*** all things together for our good. The word ***"work"*** there means that everything that happens to us, is used by God to accomplish His goals for us. The circumstances of life which often seem so ordinary, random, or meaningless, are transformed into special, direct, and useful tools in the hands of our King in the lives of those that love Him.

If you love the Lord Jesus, you cannot lose. Because of this great truth, whatever happens to you helps you. Some examples can help:

- If I lose my job, the Lord uses this to teach me and grow me and my trust in Him. He provides in amazing ways and eventually brings me to what is good and even better for me.

- If I am slandered and maligned, I am taught by Him to suffer patiently (as He did) and look to Him for help. I end up rejoicing that I am counted worthy to suffer for His name.

- If I am sick, my sickness can drive me deep into His love for me and point unsaved family and friends to the only source of life.

This great truth led Paul to write just a few verses later the words, ***"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?"*** (Romans 8:31, NKJV)

LESSON TWO

FILL 'ER UP

PASTOR ROY TOWNSEND

I do not know if you have ever experienced this before, but when I was a kid, I would love to go to a full-service gas station. It may seem like something out of a movie today, but there was something exciting about pulling into the station, the attendant coming to the window, and saying, “Fill ‘er up!” As a matter of fact, my wife and I visited New Jersey one time, and I jumped out of the car to fill ‘er up, and I thought I was in big trouble. Apparently, there are no self-serve gas stations in New Jersey, and the attendants were not amused by the guy from Michigan. Almost every time we would pull into the station, we would have a big need for fuel. If we did not get any gas, we would soon be on the side of the road and have no way to get where we needed to go, and they would fill ‘er up.

1. Have you ever been to a full-service gas station? What do you remember about it?

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2. Are you the type of person who gets gas before you need it? Or are you a person who arrives at the station running on fumes?

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The promise from God to provide comes from Philippians 4:19. It reads, ***“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”*** When I started studying this verse in the Greek language, it read, ***“But my God will fill up all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus”*** (Greek Interlinear). When I read this, it made me smile, and it reminded me of arriving at the gas station because of my need, and I said, “Fill ‘er up.” God is making a promise to fill up our needs. According to *“Got Questions,”* we know that God’s “providence is the governance of God by which He, with wisdom and love, cares for and directs all things in the universe.” We understand that God

directs all aspects of our lives. Grudem states, “It is amazing to see the extent to which Scripture affirms that God brings about various events in our lives. For example, our dependence on God to give us food each day is affirmed every time we pray, ‘Give us this day our daily bread,’ even though we work for our food and obtain it through entirely natural causes. Similarly, Paul, looking at events with the eye of faith, affirms that ***‘my God will supply every need’*** of His children, even though God may use ordinary means (such as other people) to do so.”

3. What is the difference between ***“supply”*** and ***“fill up”*** your needs?

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4. Do you see how God can fill up your needs by using natural causes or using other people to fill up or meet your needs?

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5. When circumstances are bad, do you believe that God is in control? Do you believe that He will fill up or supply your needs?

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The backstory is that the Apostle Paul was in need, and the Philippians came through with very generous gifts from very poor people. Paul writes in verse 18, ***“I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.”*** In response, Paul relays this promise from God. We can see that this promise is connected to God’s people, and this promise is connected to giving people. Hughes writes, “We see that this

promise of supply is for generous people like the Philippians and cannot be claimed by those who live for themselves." God would provide for them just like they had provided for Paul.

6. Do you see the importance of living for Him instead of living for yourself?

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7. Many people argue that they cannot afford to be generous because they need to provide for themselves. Does this seem contradictory to you? How does this fit with this promise?

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It really is a huge promise to supply every need, but if God does not supply it, then maybe it is not a need. Sometimes, we look at our needs as only physical needs like health, wealth, food, and clothing, but what about joy, steadfastness, endurance, peace, and courage? We need to be sure that our desires are needs.

8. God makes a promise to supply your needs, not your greed. What is the difference?

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9. Do you see a difference in these two statements: God will supply your needs out of his riches or ***"according to his riches."*** Is there a difference? Why or why not?

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Romans 11:36 gives the promise, ***"For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."*** Hughes writes that this promise "is exceeded beyond all imagination by the lavish 'wealth' of the eternal God, who dwells 'in glory' full of 'riches' made available 'in Christ Jesus.' God's 'riches' are inherent in his being as the Creator and the God of the universe."

10. Do you struggle with this promise from God to provide? Why?

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NOTES

the Lord gives new life

DEVOTION #1 - MARK PITTENGER

Have you ever been asked if you know someone, and you reply with, “I know of him.” This goes along with the line, “It is a small world.” Another way to see it is through the lens of social media. It is when you meet someone (while on vacation, at a concert, or just out and about), have a great conversation, and then connect through social media. Later, when you see something they post, you never get to really know the person; you get to know of them.

If you Google search the definition of “know”, you get two answers:

1. Be aware of something through observation, inquiry, or information.

2. Have developed a relationship with (someone) through meeting and spending time with them.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, it says, ***“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”*** Paul’s ministry and authority in Corinth were being ridiculed and challenged based on how they viewed him from their worldly perspective. To better understand Paul’s response in verse 17, let us look at the previous few verses. Verses 14-16 read, ***“For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we***

regard him thus no longer." Paul tells them that they need not worry about their outward appearance and to focus on what is on the inside. Much like social media, our true selves are often hidden from the public view. People often only know the social you. Only those who have a true relationship with us, really know us.

Paul also refers to the true conversion of oneself when one really knows Jesus. Who better to speak on this inward conversion than Paul? The very one whose job was to persecute Christians is now saying that because Christ died for all, we all should live for Christ! If we truly want to live for Jesus, we have to live like Jesus, and to live like Jesus, we have to know Jesus! So, how do we get to know Jesus? Look back at the definition of "know" given to us earlier by Google. We have to observe, inquire, and develop a relationship with Him, with habitual studying of the Bible, praying, and asking questions if we truly want to see the benefits of our conversions.

Once we decide to dedicate our lives to living for Jesus, we are a new creation. The old us is no more and we are made new! It is then that our perspective of others should shift from a worldly view, to seeing others through God's perspective. It is this promise of being made new that can only be found in believing the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus as historical and actual facts.

Are you living in a way that reflects a new creation in Jesus? I hope so. If not, will you accept the challenge? Remember, it is not knowing of Jesus, but rather knowing Jesus. There is a difference.

In 1 John 2:6, we are challenged, ***"Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked."***

do you know the truth?

DEVOTION #2 - GARY WRIGHT

"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" John 14:6

In John 14:6, Jesus promises that He is the truth. A great example of truth happened while I was preparing this devotion. My wife Kim and I were two days away from a week of vacation in East Tawas. The trip had been planned for a year, and we were really looking forward to getting away. While I was writing, I received a call from work asking if I could work two days of our vacation. As much as I would have loved to help out, I knew the truth. The truth is that my wife would have killed me if I left her at the vacation rental and went home to work for two days. I am sure many of you can relate.

In John 13:37, Jesus is on trial before Pontius Pilate. Jesus says to Pilate, ***"I have come into the world - to bear witness to the truth."*** Pilate asked Jesus in John 18:38, ***"What is truth?"*** This is the same question people still ask today. In Greek, the definition of truth refers to it as "divine revelation," and it is related to a word that means "what cannot be hidden." The Hebrew definition of truth is "firmness, constancy, and duration." *"Gotquestions.org"* says such a definition implies an everlasting substance and something that can be relied upon. The truth simply means telling it like it is, the way things really are, and that any other viewpoint is wrong.

When Jesus said, ***"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me,"*** He is telling us the way things really are. No one comes to the Father except through Jesus. That is the truth and any other viewpoint is wrong! What we do with that truth determines our eternal destiny.

The truth is reality. When it came to our vacation, the reality was if I would have left Kim for a couple of days to go to work, she would have been hurt and disappointed.

When it comes to Jesus' proclamation of the truth, the reality is that no one is going to be forgiven of their sin, nor will they get to spend eternity with the Father in Heaven, without putting their faith in Jesus.

The Bible describes each of us in Romans 3:23, ***"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*** In Romans 6:23, we learn that there is some bad news and some good news. The bad news is our sin has a price; it is death or separation from God, ***"For the wages of sin is death."*** The good news is that Jesus died on the cross to pay the price for our sins, ***"But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."***

Jesus is the Truth. Have you put your faith in Him?

Salvation is promised through Jesus, but it is only through Him. Romans 10:9 adds, ***"Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."***

peace unbroken

DEVOTION #3 - KARSEN THEEDE

"Nothing can bring you peace but yourself." This is a quote from an American philosopher named Ralph Waldo Emerson. Ralph wrote an essay back in 1841 titled *"Self-Reliance,"* in which he instructs his listener to trust his judgment above all others and that only you can make yourself happy. Unfortunately, this thought process from the earlier quote has not been left in the past. In everyday life, people are trying to be at peace. Whether that is a Mom or Dad just trying to get those couple of precious minutes to themselves or something as large as our government making sure we do not go to war, everyone is looking for peace. Because of that, we understand how fragile and sometimes unobtainable peace can be. However, what if I told you that there is a peace that has been promised to us and is not easily destroyed?

Right now we are going through a series about God's promises and, more specifically, God's promises to us as believers. Right now, I want to focus on how the Lord gives us peace.

John 14:27 states, ***"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."***

Peace within the Bible can have a few different meanings. It can be a physical peace, used in relation to humans, as a freedom from disputes, or in this context, a blessing of peace from God. Freedom from disputes is something short-lived. We can see this in our everyday lives. You might think you finally reached peace with your family, but then someone forgot to run the laundry, or someone

cuts you off on the road, and bam, your peace is broken. On the other hand, peace from God is something inward. It is the Holy Spirit working in you. Just like the disciples, whose lives were being drastically changed, Jesus told them that He was going up to the Father to prepare an eternal place for them. They felt no physical peace, but Jesus was telling them to have peace, knowing that He would be sending the Holy Spirit to give them peace until they joined Him in eternity.

The disciples had to trust and believe in order to feel this peace that Jesus spoke about, much like we do. God's blessing of peace is not easily breakable, but we must have trust in Jesus to feel it. After you have accepted Christ and are living for Him, even when the peace in your surroundings is broken, you have peace knowing that you have eternal security.

God promises to give direction

DEVOTION #4 - ADELINE SANCHEZ

There is a certain detail in the story of the Israelites traveling from Egypt to the Promised Land that I legitimately think about all the time. We learn in Exodus 13:21 that God led the Israelites by a pillar of cloud through the day and a pillar of fire by night. The first time I read that, it was one of those moments where my brain said, “Hold up! Rewind that for a second. What did you just say?” It is so crazy, not only that God would do that for them, but also that the Israelites trusted that this cloud or fire was taking them where they were supposed to go. Also, if you look up the distance from Egypt to Canaan (The Promised Land), the amount of time it should have taken the Israelites to get from point A to point B is approximately eleven days. Do you want to know how long it took them to get there? You guessed it, eleven days! Ha, just kidding, it was actually 40 years.

Now, do not be fooled into thinking that God was purposely making them wander for 40 years with no rhyme or reason to it, and definitely do not assume that the Israelites were completely submissive and obedient to God’s direction 100% of the time. Have you ever been driving with a GPS but then forgot that you were driving with a GPS? You keep missing turns, and the GPS has to redirect you to get you to your destination. Eventually, you will arrive at your destination. It is just going to take a lot longer than you originally thought. Imagine if you missed a turn while driving with a GPS, and the GPS just decided to turn off altogether because you did not follow it properly. Of course, that would not happen because the GPS is programmed to give you endless alternate routes no matter how many turns you miss.

The reason Israel's eleven-day journey took 40 years was because of their sin. They let their fear, impatience, pride, and endless other flaws control them and their reactions to God's direction, but God never gave up on them. God continued to give them direction for their entire 40-year journey through the wilderness even when He was so fed up with their stiff-necked selves and their sins. He never left them stranded. He continued to direct them towards the Promised Land despite their blatant disobedience.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, ***"Trust In the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."*** God will never give up on us, even when we take wrong turns. If we can learn to put aside and surrender our fear and pride to God, He will give us direction. I promise that God's direction for you is so much better than yours, and He will get us there if we trust Him.

i am convinced

DEVOTION #5 - DEBBIE GABBARA

"And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow - not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below - indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:38-39 (NLT)

The conviction that Paul has as he begins to explain to the Romans how much God loves us is so incredible! He says, ***"I am convinced."*** Paul was convinced because he had seen the power of God at work in his life and in the lives of so many others who came to faith in Christ Jesus.

A couple of days ago, I spent the afternoon going through a box that has been under the bed and moved from home to home with our family for 35 years. Inside the box was a treasure of cards and letters from my husband, children, and friends. My husband, Larry, and I had a great time looking at funny things the kids made for us over the years and reading sweet cards and notes from them. There were also cards that said, "Thank you" and "I'm sorry." However, the majority of the box was filled with cards we gave to each other to remind each other of how very much we love one another.

Paul's relationship with the Lord was as real as the relationship I share with my family and husband. I have been convinced for 35 years that Larry loves me by the words he has written and the love

that he has put into action towards me and our family over all these years.

God wrote a love letter to us and called it the Bible. It is filled with promises that God left to remind us of how much He loves us. His love for us continues forever and will never stop. Look again at what Paul said in Romans 8: ***"And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love."*** It is not death, life, angels, or demons. We do not have to worry about today or tomorrow because not even the powers of Hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below; nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I get an email each day called the Daily Promise. Every day, there is a verse in my email mailbox that reminds me of the promises that God has made to us and how much He loves us. Here are a couple of my favorites from the last few days:

- We are made alive in Christ. Ephesians 2:4-5 (NLT) says, ***"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved."***

- God's love is beyond imagination. Ephesians 3:18-19 says, ***"And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God."***

God promises to always love us! Nothing we can do will ever separate us from His love. Because of His mercy and grace, we are saved through faith in Christ Jesus. Hard things may happen, but nothing will ever cause our Father to stop loving us. I am convinced

that nothing we can do will ever separate us from Him or change how God feels about us. I hope you are, too.

Author and Christian educator, Henrietta Mears, said so beautifully about Romans chapter 8: “This glorious chapter opens with ‘no condemnation’ and ends with ‘no separation.’ This is a picture of our life ‘in Christ,’ the Christian is safe. Christ is around him; the Spirit is within him; and God is for him.”

our theme passage

DEVOTION #6 - PASTOR JUSTIN DEAN

When I was asked to write a devotion focused on the promise found in Psalm 46:1-3, no one knew that this has been a theme verse for our family for the last 18 months. Our emotions have ranged from the loss of a baby nephew, to my wife's pregnancy with our first child, to major surgeries in our families, to the difficulties of life and finances. This promise has been one we clung to throughout it all.

Psalm 46:1-3 says, ***"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling."***

Times of trouble are inevitable in the fallen world that we live in. As much as that reality stings, we can find peace knowing that we have Someone to run to when that trouble comes our way. God is our help, our safe place, and the only One who can give us the strength and stability to weather the storms of life. The word I find most comforting in these verses is ***"present."*** He is not a faraway help, sending us care packages to get us through, but One weathering the storm right beside us. He sees us, is with us, and deeply cares for us. How comforting it is to know that our God, Creator of the universe, Commander of the wind and seas, is available to us as our help in times of great need.

When was a time when you needed a ***"very present help"***?

How did God show up?

I keep this verse bookmarked in my Bible because when I am too distraught or discouraged to search for a verse, I flip here to be reminded of Who is available to me when I am in need. It is so important that we know and hold to this promise because, in a fallen world where storms are guaranteed, we need to remember where to turn for refuge and strength.

The Lord is available in our time of trouble.

LESSON THREE

THE PROMISE TO RETURN

PASTOR NOBLE BAIRD

Movies are an incredible work of art. Now, do not get me wrong, some movies should have simply never been made or produced. However, when you do watch a true masterpiece on the big screen or at home, it is fantastic. Within the sphere of film and movies, whenever there is a trilogy or a series, many times, it is within the final entry that we see the triumph! For example, in *"Star Wars,"* the original trilogy (yes, the greatest fictional universe ever created), Episode VI is *"The Return of the Jedi."* It is the culmination of Luke Skywalker finally becoming a Jedi Knight, redemption for his father, Anakin Skywalker, and the defeat of the Empire! Or you can take a trip through Middle Earth alongside the *"Fellowship of the Ring,"* as they set out on their task to return the one ring to Mount Doom. It is ultimately in *"The Return of the King,"* where not only do we see the Fellowship succeed in their task to destroy the one Ring of Sauron, but we also see Aragon take his rightful place as the King of Arnor, the King of Gondor, and the first High King of the Reunited Kingdom in Middle Earth.

1. What is one of your favorite movie trilogies or series?

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2. What are some movies that have a character return?

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3. What happens when there is a return of a character or hero in a movie?

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Now, please know my heart: movies are fun, but none of these are real. Yes, they are all made-up fictional characters and worlds for fun. However, as we continue our series on promises, I want to

take a look at a real-life character in God's Living Word who will return one day! In Revelation 22:12-13, John records an incredible declaration from Jesus, ***"Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."*** Wow, let us take a few minutes to process and fully comprehend this declaration. Honestly, I am not sure if there is a more powerful declaration of an eminent return in all history. These words are not hyperbole; they are not a possibility, and they are not even a potential outcome. This is a declaration of truth and a promise made by Jesus Christ for all the world to know and hear.

4. Have you ever made a statement or promise before?

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5. Did you follow through on that statement or promise? What was the outcome?

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Whenever making promises, we must be very cautious and careful with our words. Our words are one of the most important and precious belongings we have, after our testimony through Jesus Christ. In the New Testament alone, the return of Christ is mentioned over 300 times, and over 1,500 in the Old Testament! This is, without a doubt, a promise you can take to the bank! Some important things we can know about the return of Christ are the following:

- Christ will physically return to Earth in His glorious and resurrected body.

- His return will mark the imminent end of this Earth.

- He will triumphantly defeat Satan.

- He will bring an end to sin on this Earth.

- We will never know the day or hour of His return until He returns!

Christ's physical return is promised in many passages. In Matthew 24:27-31, we read, ***"For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."*** Here, we are told how Christ will return, and His return will be seen all across the world. No one will miss it!

6. Is there a passage of Christ's return that sticks out to you or that you cling to?

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7. How do you personally feel about the imminent return of Christ? What emotions come with this knowledge of the promise?

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Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3, ***"Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything***

written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape." Then Jesus says in Matthew 24:36, ***"But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only."*** Did you catch that? No one knows! There have been preachers, teachers, men, and women who have dedicated their lives gone to great extremes claiming to "know" when Christ will return. However, we can be confident in God's Word and know without a doubt that we will never know! So, next time you or someone you know gets into the discussion of when Christ will return, take the opportunity to change the discussion to, "Yes, we know He will; so, what are you doing to share the Gospel and His love till He comes?"

8. Have you been caught up in the timing of Christ's return?

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9. What are you doing, or what will you begin doing, to share the Gospel and prepare others for His promised return?

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Yes, it can seem pretty scary to think about the return of Christ and what that means for this world we live in. The thought of everything coming to an end is daunting. The thought of all we possess, own, and have worked for going away is a weird thought. However, within these emotions and feelings, there is and ought to be peace in our lives. Paul writes in Philippians 4:7 about the peace of God, which is beyond our understanding. This simply means that it is a peace that we cannot put into words of men, but a true peace that is experienced only through our relationship with Jesus Christ. It is a peace that we experience in times of uncertainty, anxiety, worry, and

fear. It is the same peace that we can have when we think about the true return of the King. Peace comes from knowing that, as followers of Jesus Christ, His return truly only marks the beginning of our lives with Him. It is a life without sin, suffering, and death. So, as we continue our series on promises, I hope you are encouraged and have peace knowing that the King will return.

Christ's return will be greater than any producer or movie money could buy. His return will be seen by the entire world, and all of the Earth will know that He has come. It is my hope and prayer that we do not grow weary or lose focus as the church in 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 did. However, we should stay focused on sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ and continue to prioritize Him in all things.

10. How can you refocus this week to prioritizing the Gospel and sharing the Gospel in your daily life? If you already are, how can we continue to keep centered on that mission?

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NOTES

exempt from the wrath of God

DEVOTION #1 - DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

"Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God."
Romans 5:9

I enjoy saltwater aquariums. I am baffled on how many colors are displayed even though the water is so salty. I cannot comprehend how someone can deny God's creative work when they see all the different life forms clothed in such beauty. God is the Creator and His imagination is beyond what our limited minds can digest.

As I read Romans 5:9, I cringe at the phrase ***"wrath of God."*** If God can be so creative in creation, imagine what can be done in destruction. It is not a comforting thought. It is dreadful.

The ***"wrath of God"*** is normally viewed as an Old Testament concept, and it is mentioned some twenty-five times. Even though people want to describe God in the Old Testament as wrath and portray Him as love in the New Testament, the ***"wrath of God"*** is referenced eighteen times in the New Testament. God does not change; sin cannot be taken lightly. God's holiness must be respected. He is just (while being loving).

I hope you grasp these two points:

- No one is too bad that they cannot receive the forgiveness of God through salvation in Jesus Christ and avoid the ***"wrath of God."***

- No one is so good that they do not need a Savior (Jesus the Christ) from the ***"wrath of God."***

We all have sinned (Romans 3:23) and do not deserve anything good (much less Heaven). Actually, we deserve death (Romans 6:23). Fortunately, God chose to love us and sent His only Son to die for our sins. He promises not only that believers will avoid the ***"wrath of God,"*** but also that we will get to experience eternal life (John 3:16).

John 3:36 summarizes this promise well, ***"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."***

Colossians 3:5-6 gives a sobering challenge and reminder to believers, ***"Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming."***

The ***"wrath of God"*** is coming, but believers do not have to fear it due to God's promise of eternal life and being exempt from this wrath. However, we should live differently as a thank you to God and to point others to Him. We should not become lazy in our comfortable chair, basking in the delight of His promise as the world fades away into oblivion.

big mistakes, huge redemption

DEVOTION #2 - ALYSSA FAIRSE

At the age of 16, I was held for ransom. After a seven-month relationship with a 21-year-old guy who was a drug dealer, I ran away from home to be with him. Little did I know that he and his friend, Aaron, contacted my dad, asking him for $20,000 for my safe return home. My dad met Aaron in the parking lot of an outdoor shopping center. Right after my dad handed the money over to Aaron, the police came out and arrested him. Not long later, the police and my dad arrived at Aaron's apartment, where I was being held. Aaron and everyone that was with him went to jail, and my dad took me home. Before we left, one of the police officers told my dad, "Since she is adopted, you have the right to put her back into foster care. It happens all of the time; people will adopt a child, realize they are too much to handle, and put them back into foster care."

When my dad and I got home that day, he did not yell, he did not punish me, and he did not even ask why I ran away. He told me he loved me and reminded me that there was nothing I could do to change that. In the weeks to follow, my mom and dad made a plan for us to go to family counseling.

I am really glad my parents did not weigh my value solely based on the mistake I had made that day. They could have done exactly what that police officer told my dad to do: give me up. That day, I not only put myself in danger, but my dad as well. They did not deserve or need to put up with that, but still, they chose to. Instead of pushing me away and using my mistake as a reason to throw me back into the foster care system, they chose to show me the love of Christ. My dad not only laid himself down for my sake but continued to love me as his daughter. He did it even if I may not have deserved it.

Romans 8:1 says, ***"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."***

As people, we are capable of messing up in big ways! Today, I want you to know that God's redemption is way bigger than any mistake you or anyone else could ever make. Jesus can and will save you from any sin, error, or evil that has arisen in your life. John 3:18 tells us that anyone who believes in Jesus will not be condemned. All we need to do is confess with our mouths and believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead, and we will be saved (Romans 10:9).

the Lord gives hope

DEVOTION #3 - LORENA NORRIS

Human beings have an insatiable need for hope. We quite literally build our lives around hope. We desire hope through a certain lifestyle, career, skill, and so on. In a world that often seems chaotic and unjust, we are driven to ask, “What is my hope truly in?”

The apostle Peter provides us with the answer in 1 Peter 1:3-5. He brings us to the death and resurrection of Jesus and what it means to have hope. Verse 3 says, ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”*** In verses 4 and 5, Peter goes on to describe an inheritance that is ***“imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.”*** This is our salvation and future in Heaven with Jesus! This inheritance can never be taken away because it is guarded by God’s power. It is hope that is secure, unchanging, and untouched by our earthly struggles.

While our hope remains untouchable, we are not. Life’s trials can feel like a furnace - burning, hurting, and sometimes consuming. As disciples, we are called to hold onto a hope that transforms how we endure fire. In verses 6 and 7, Peter invites us to see that this living hope in Jesus’ resurrection can lead us to joy in trials. He says, ***“In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith - more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire - may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”*** This joy is not a superficial “turn that frown upside down” attitude but

a deep-seated assurance rooted in Christ's unchanging promise. Our hope in His act of love on the cross allows us to find joy that is not defined by our circumstances.

Present sorrow and suffering cannot rob us of our joy because they cannot take away our hope. Our hope is untouchable, kept, guarded, and anchored in the resurrection of Jesus, who faced all our sins and suffering for us. Jesus, who endured the ultimate trial, became what we are so we can become more like Him. This hope is secure not because of anything we have done but because of what Jesus has accomplished on our behalf.

Suffering has a unique way of focusing our hearts on what truly matters. It compels us to confront our false hopes and identities, challenging us to consider whether we are relying on fleeting things or the living hope of Christ. It is a paradox: the fire is painful, but it is also a strange, unwelcome gift. It melts away our false hopes and reveals our true reliance on Jesus.

In your trials, will you let the fire refine you and expose false hopes and identities that you need to confront, or will you be crushed by the weight of your suffering? Let your hope in Jesus guide you through the flames and lead you to a joy that transforms the way you live and the way you walk through fire.

our work matters

DEVOTION #4 - RICH SAWICKI

"Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." 1 Corinthians 15:58

This verse gives us a powerful reminder that our hard work for God is never wasted. Let us break it down and look at what it means for us today.

Stay Strong

Paul starts by calling us ***"beloved brothers"*** (and sisters, too). He is talking to all of us who believe Jesus is God and that He died on the cross for our sins, rose again, and is alive today. Paul says, ***"Be steadfast."*** This means we should stay strong in our faith. Imagine you are a tree with deep roots. When a big storm comes, the tree bends but does not fall because its roots hold it steady. That is how our faith should be - strong and steady.

Do Not Get Distracted

Paul then says to be ***"immovable."*** This means not letting anything push or pull us away from following Jesus. Life can be full of distractions and tough times. Sometimes, we might feel like giving up when things get hard or when it seems like our efforts are not making a difference. Yet, Paul tells us to keep going.

Give Your Best to God's Work

Paul also says we should be ***"always abounding in the work of the Lord."*** This means doing our best in whatever we do for God. Whether it is helping others, being kind, or sharing God's love, we should do it with our whole hearts. Think about how you feel when you do something you are really proud of, like finishing a big project or helping a friend. That is how we should feel about our work for God - excited and committed.

Your Efforts Are Not Wasted

Now, here is the best part. Paul promises us that ***"in the Lord your labor is not in vain."*** This means everything we do for God matters. Sometimes, it might seem like no one notices or cares about the good things we do, but God sees it all. He values every effort we make.

Think about planting a seed. When you plant it, you do not see it grow right away. However, with time, it becomes a beautiful tree. In the same way, the good things we do might not show results immediately, but they are growing and making a difference, often in ways we cannot see yet.

Keep Going

So, what can we take away from this verse? First, stay strong in your faith. Do not let anything shake you. Keep focused on following Jesus, no matter what distractions come your way. Give your best to whatever you do for God. Finally, remember that your efforts are not wasted. God sees everything you do and promises that it matters.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, thank You for the promise that our work for You is never in vain. Help us stay strong and focused, giving our best in everything we do for You. Remind us that You see our efforts and that they matter. Fill us with hope and confidence as we serve You each day. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

from secret clubs to a divine family

DEVOTION #5 - DAVID HUDGENS

When I was growing up, it was fun to create make-believe, secret clubs. Did you do this, too, when you were a kid? My friends and I once had a club where entry would only be granted if you knew the secret handshake and could, of course, recite the secret pledge. We convinced ourselves that a secret handshake and secret pledge would perhaps give us a feeling of exclusivity, which honestly made it all the more thrilling, even though the secret activity of the club was hardly profound. Mostly, it was just fun to believe that belonging to this club made us special and connected us in some unique way.

Reflecting further on those childhood antics brings to mind a deeper and more important invitation that is offered to us through Jesus Christ. In John 1:12, we read, ***"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."*** Unlike my childhood club, which has trivial requirements, the invitation to become part of God's family is not based on secret knowledge or exclusive rituals. It is open to everyone who receives Jesus and believes in His name.

This divine invitation is illuminated by the wisdom of God, which is often compared to light within Scripture. For instance, in Psalm 119:105, it says, ***"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."*** God's wisdom is not hidden in darkness. It is revealed clearly in Scripture and in the person of Jesus, guiding us toward a relationship with Him. Just as light dispels darkness and reveals what is hidden, God's wisdom, His Word, brings clarity and direction to our lives.

The challenge for us is whether we are living in the light of His wisdom. Are we truly walking as children of God, or are we still stumbling in the dark, clinging to our own secretive ways and misguided beliefs? To be part of God's family is to embrace His Light (His revealed wisdom in the manifestation of Jesus), to let His truth guide our steps, and to align ourselves with His purposes for our good and for His glory.

Today, if you feel you are outside this divine family, know that the path is always open through Jesus. He is the Light that reveals our way back to God, and His grace extends to all who trust in Him. By putting your faith in Jesus, you step out of the shadows of doubt and into the warm light of God's family. Embrace the Light, accept the invitation, and experience the hope and belonging that comes with being a child of God.

wait until the clouds pass

DEVOTION #6 - CAMERON ALDRICH

One day, my 5-year-old daughter was riding in the car, looking out the window as my family was traveling. She was beyond thrilled when she noticed a beautiful sight up in the sky in the distance. She screamed, “Look! It’s a rainbow!” She made sure to inform everyone in the car, and all eyes glanced over to the spectacle that was making her practically jump in her car seat. Then, a moment passed, and her attitude was abruptly overtaken by disappointment as she realized that she could not see all of the rainbow due to the enormous clouds that were also present. Frustrated, she started whining, “I want to see it!” My wife kept responding, “Just be patient.” She stated it over and over to her as my daughter continued shouting out her ever-important desire.

Regardless of our age, it is so interesting how quickly our perceptions and attitudes can shift. Our feelings can change with the snap of a finger or at a moment’s notice just as something new or different happens to us, or especially as circumstances change. When considering our faith, it can be difficult to remain steadfast as we move from one situation to the next as the Lord leads us. As we continue to mature in our walk with the Lord, we can look to God’s Word to help provide us with wisdom, confidence, and perseverance in our faith.

This is undoubtedly true of the Apostle Paul when he wrote to Timothy. In 2 Timothy 4:7-8, Paul expresses the following, ***“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award***

to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing."

Paul is nearing the end of his ministry when he writes this letter to Timothy. Throughout his life, he endured and stood firm in his faith amidst hardships and near-hopeless situations. Paul lays out the inheritance that God promises to provide to those of us that do not stray from His will and purpose, even when storms and harsh weather appear in our lives.

Within this passage, Paul essentially states that he pressed on and never gave up carrying out the responsibilities and tasks that God gave to him throughout his journey. Having done so, he is now able to receive the reward that the Lord promised to him. That reward is a crown of righteousness. That means he is able to be restored and redeemed so that he can be seen as righteous in the eyes of God and then be re-unified with the Father in Heaven. There is no greater reward that we could receive compared to this.

It can be so easy to have excitement and to put in great amounts of effort when we begin a new chapter in our lives or as we find ourselves in new situations. We can have certainty of the beauty and blessing that they are to us at first. However, it can also be tempting and challenging to remain strong and steadfast in these circumstances, especially when storms do come.

When Paul stated that he ***"fought the good fight,"*** I believe it was clear that his perception did not waver throughout his journey. He did not let the storms and difficulties shroud his judgment. He viewed his fight as good because his fight was provided to him by the Lord. Serving and living for our Father is good, no matter the circumstances.

After our family had driven for a while longer, we were able to see many different views of the rainbow which first caught my daughter's eye. Most of the time, we could not see much of it due to the surrounding storms. There were only slight glimpses of its beauty.

However, after a while, my daughter's eyes opened wide with awe once again, for as we continued driving and were finally clear of the storms, we were able to see the rainbow almost in its entirety from end to end. It was such a cool sight that I am sure my daughter will not soon forget. She just needed to be patient to see it.

LESSON FOUR

WORK TO REST

PASTOR PHILIP PIASECKI

I believe that every person's first house that they own should be a fixer-upper. It is the absolute best way for a husband to learn how to be a "handy-man." Prior to buying our first house, I knew how to do some of the basics, but nothing makes you learn quicker than being faced with a housing problem that you cannot afford to pay someone else to fix for you. I remember my wife and I being so excited to close on our first home together. We signed all the paperwork and ran right over to the house once we were done with the closing. I walked down into the basement to find a puddle of water, and so began my yearlong battle with that leaky basement. After trying multiple solutions, finally, my Dad and I decided to rip out the concrete and fix the issue right at the source. I will never forget the level of exhaustion from carrying buckets and buckets of concrete up the basement steps. However, once the issue was fully fixed, I will never forget how satisfying it was to finally lay down and rest that night, knowing the work that we had accomplished.

1. What is the hardest day of work you have ever done?

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Matthew 11:28-30 says, ***"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."***

Every person on this earth is looking for rest. It seems like everything we do these days is built around the idea of how to get more rest. I know I am guilty of that. After wrangling three kids, taking care of my wife and my home, and trying to be a good pastor to our church, there are some days when I wake up asking when my next chance to sleep is going to be! Not only are we all looking for physical rest, but we all are looking for spiritual rest as well. Every day, I see people who are looking for something, really anything, to calm their souls.

2. What are some things that you find yourself trying to find your physical or spiritual rest in?

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First, the Good News in this Scripture is that Jesus calls all who ***"labor and are heavy laden"*** to come to Him. Kent Hughes, in his commentary on Matthew, says, "He invites the tired, the poor, the tempest-tossed, the wretched refuse, those huddled masses yearning to be free." He does not just invite those who have it all together. All are welcome to come to Him for their salvation, and salvation is found in Christ alone.

3. How does the truth that Jesus calls ***"all"*** to come to Him an encouragement to you?

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Okay, so at this point, we are all thinking, "Yes that sounds great, I need some rest, how do I get this?" I believe we cannot miss the word ***"labor"*** in this Scripture. As the Scripture continues in verse 29, Jesus tells us to take His yoke upon us. If you do not know, a yoke is an instrument for work. It is a wooden frame that is placed upon the shoulders in order to make a load or burden easier to carry. Part of us may be wishing Jesus would have said, "Take my mattress," or "Take my chair," for rest. That may make a little more sense to us, but instead, we are called to labor for the work of the Lord.

4. How does laboring for the Lord lead to rest?

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When we are following the Lord faithfully, serving Him, serving His church, and making disciples, at the end of the day our soul will find its rest is Jesus because we are living our life for Him. He is the only thing that can bring the fulfillment that our souls need, and a day's work done for Him leads to rest in Him. Jesus does not promise us a way to escape from reality, He promises that He will provide the right equipment to deal with it.

5. Has there been a time when you were physically exhausted from serving the Lord but felt this spiritual rest from Jesus in your life?

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I think back to different times when I had the privilege to serve on our prison trips prior to 2020. It would be two full days of nonstop ministry. It included meeting in the hotel lobby while the rest of the hotel was still sleeping, setting up equipment on blacktop on 90-degree days, playing music and ministering to the inmates while sweating more than I ever had before, packing up at the end of the day just praying to survive until we found an Outback Steakhouse or Texas Roadhouse. Every person serving on those trips would be so exhausted at the end of the day, but we would have the biggest smile on our faces because we knew we were able to do it all for the Lord. Even though it was physically exhausting, it was spiritually restful and rejuvenating because we saw the Lord work.

Mark 6:30-32 says, ***"The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, 'Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves."***

I absolutely love this passage from Mark. Here, we see the disciples returning to Jesus after being busy with the ministry of Jesus, and

they share with Him all that they had done and taught. Just think of how encouraging that must have been to Jesus and the other disciples to hear the testimonies of what the Lord did through each of them. When I hear about what the Lord is doing in someone's life, it gives my soul so much rest and rejuvenation to continue to work for the Lord. Please be bold enough to let someone know when they encourage you spiritually. Also, we want to humbly share with others what we have seen the Lord doing in order to encourage them to pursue Jesus more in their own lives.

6. What is something that you have seen the Lord do recently that encouraged your spiritual walk?

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7. What are some ways that you can better share about the ways you have seen the Lord working and moving with others?

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After the disciples shared with Jesus what had happened, He called them away to rest for a while. The Scripture says they had been so busy they had not even had time to eat. So, He takes them away to a ***"desolate place"*** to rest. Again, here we see Jesus giving rest to those who labored for Him. We can trust that when Jesus says that He will give us rest, He will actually do it. Allow yourself to rest in Him, trusting that what He says in His Scriptures is true! However, their rest does not last for long. It is right after this Scripture that we see the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 (Matthew 14:13-21). Our rest in Christ should always call us back to serving Him more.

8. In what ways are you currently active in working for the Lord?

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Please do not confuse this idea of working for the Lord as only something that can happen within the church. Each day at your workplace, in your home, and at your schools, you can serve the Lord by being a witness for Him and working hard in a way that honors Him. The list could go on and on. We are called to go into all the world and preach the Gospel! Live your life in a way where you are always looking for how you can honor Christ and how you can make Him the focal point of what you are doing. Through that, you will find your rest in Him.

9. What are some ideas that could help you be more effective in the work of the Gospel in your everyday life?

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Please know that if you are serving seven days a week at your local church with the wrong heart and the wrong attitude, you will not find this rest that Jesus promises. All you will find is bitterness and burnout. We must keep our love for Jesus at the center of our serving, and do it for His glory, not our own prideful hearts.

Colossians 3:23-24 adds, ***"Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ."***

10. How can you make sure you are keeping your heart in the right place when you are serving Jesus?

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Scripture is full of work orders. Think of the rest you feel in your bones after a hard day's work. Kent Hughes says, "Rest comes from working. Rest comes from laboring. Rest comes from obedience. Rest comes in seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Rest comes from God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven." We find our rest in the finished work of Christ. The salvation He offers all of us allows us to rest knowing that we are now His children, and we can then fully dedicate ourselves to the work of His Gospel.

NOTES

the Lord promises the Bible is truthful

DEVOTION #1 - PASTOR PATRICK BICKNELL

"Truth" is such a distorted thing in the world we live in today. One of the most common things I see our culture pushing is for people to "live their truth." What they mean by saying these things is they believe that whatever someone thinks to be the truth is the truth, and therefore, they should live by that. Unfortunately, it is such a sad lie that our world is pushing on people. It completely disregards what God has intended for His creation and distorts what the real truth about God is.

As we start to see that "living our truth" is a lie from the enemy, the next question for us becomes, what then is the truth? It is a question that has been asked since God first created man in the garden. We saw Adam and Eve question the truth of God when the serpent tempted them in Genesis 3:1 by asking, ***"Did God actually say…"*** Pontius Pilate had the same question when Jesus was brought before him. John 18:37-38 says, ***"Then Pilate said to him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world - to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.' Pilate said to him 'What is truth?'"*** Thankfully, we know where the truth comes from and how we can walk in the truth.

If we go back one chapter earlier to John chapter 17, we will see another amazing promise that Jesus gives to us about the truth. John 17:17 reads, ***"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."*** One of the biggest blessings we have as followers of Christ living in the world today is the complete Word of God. Everything we

need to know God, follow God, cherish God, obey God, and find the salvation God has provided can be found in the Bibles we have. It is the complete, inerrant, inspired Word of God.

In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul writes, ***"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."*** This is such a foundational truth for our walk with Christ. If we do not believe that all of Scripture is the Word of God, even the parts we have a hard time understanding or agreeing with, then why follow it? We cannot pick and choose what we like within the Word of God and follow the lie of this world that we are to "live our truth." Jesus makes His claim very boldly and right to the point. He says, ***"Your word is truth."*** Let us hold fast to this truth, and let us be molded by Scripture day after day so that we may be equipped for every good work that God puts in front of us.

God promises He is near

DEVOTION #2 - JASMYN BICKNELL

"Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded." James 4:8

When I think of drawing near to something or someone, I think of comfort. That leads me to find rest in that person or thing. We should be finding our rest in the Lord, as we are told in Matthew chapter 11. When we draw near to Him, we find our comfort and rest. We can leave our anxieties and worries at the feet of Jesus. He cares for us by taking those burdens onto His own shoulders so that we do not have to carry them.

How is it possible to draw near to Him? Do you remember in the Old Testament when only the priests were allowed to communicate with the Lord on special days and only after they went through an entire ritual of cleansing themselves? Thankfully, we no longer have to do that because we have freedom in Christ to speak to Him whenever we want. Because of the great sacrifice of Jesus' life, coming to the world as human to bridge the gap between Heaven and earth, we can have a personal relationship with Him without needing to go through someone else.

That is wonderful! We have a loving Father who wants, no, yearns for our relationship! This is the promise of His great love. John 3:16 says, ***"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son."*** Can you imagine sacrificing your only child for a world full of people who could not care less about you or him? It is for the people that you created, who you long to have a close relationship with, and

who you have offered unending grace, love, and mercy. Yet, they cast you aside for worldly things. God loves you; all He wants is to spend an eternity with you, admiring His beloved creation. However, in order to do so, we must answer the call of Christ to draw near to Him and to share His love.

How do we do that? Dive into His Word, worship with songs of praise, and pray to Him constantly. He is always there while you are driving to work, in the middle of the night when you are unable to sleep, when you are so overwhelmed with life, and when everything feels like utter chaos. The Lord is there waiting for you to respond to Him and lean on His hand that is outstretched to you. Embrace the comfort and love that He has for you. He wants His children to be close to Him, but as with any relationship, it is a two-way street. You must do your part to keep the bond strong.

With all this being said, we must remember that the Lord never leaves us. If we feel distant from Him, guess who moved? ***"Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."***

never forsaken

DEVOTION #3 - JEANNIE YATES

When I was growing up, my best friend's family often opened up their home to children in the foster care system. Sometimes, it was for a little while, and sometimes the placements were long-term. I was a teenager when they made room for a sweet little girl; I will call her Jane. Jane seemed to fit right in with this family, playing with the other kids and adjusting well. However, they began to notice that she was not actually eating at meal times, yet her food was always disappearing. One day, when making her bed, they found food stashed all around her space. This was not just a little pile of goldfish crackers or fruit snacks but partially eaten corndogs, moldy bread, and remnants of dinners from her time there. Jane was hoarding food. At just three years old, she had experienced the profound neglect of not knowing when or if she would be given another meal, and she was not quite sure if she could trust this new family to feed her again.

In Hebrews 13:5, God promises, ***"I will never leave you nor forsake you."*** This is not the first or the only time in Scripture we see this promise. In Deuteronomy 31:6, the Lord told Moses to tell the Israelites, ***"Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you."*** Also, before Jesus ascended into Heaven, He reminded His followers, ***"Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age"*** (Matthew 28:20).

The word ***"leave"*** means so much more than just absent; it includes abandon, go way, depart, and desert. Likewise, when we look at the word ***"forsake,"*** we see a much deeper meaning: to neglect,

renounce, or turn away from entirely. The New Living Translation puts it this way, ***"God has said, 'I will never fail you. I will never abandon you.'"***

The next verse in Hebrews 13 tells us why it is vital that we truly grasp the truth of this promise. Verse 6 states, ***"So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'"*** Because God never leaves me, I can walk confidently, knowing He is my helper. Because God does not neglect His children, I no longer have to hoard my dinner scraps; He is my provider. Isaiah 43:1-3 beautifully reminds us, ***"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior."***

Not long after arriving at my friend's home, Jane was adopted by a loving family. She never had to scrounge for food scraps again. Jane not only had the opportunity to be fed regular meals, but her new family took her to church so that she could hear about the never-ending love of Jesus. As a child of God, you can lean into the promise that He will not withdraw His presence; He never abandons you. God will not withdraw His help; He never neglects you.

praying for wisdom

DEVOTION #4 - DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." James 1:5

As I was walking down the hall, I felt like I was on my knees the whole time, praying, pleading, and begging God for wisdom. I was in my late twenties, serving as a Youth Pastor while coaching and teaching at the Christian school across the parking lot. However, the Senior Pastor had taken another church. So, now I was also the Interim Pastor and the only one on staff. I had taught Sunday School, preached the morning message, had a full afternoon, and preached the evening message when a new family approached me. It was a mom with her high school daughter, and a man who I found out later was a friend of the family. The mother introduced herself and then dropped a bombshell of a topic on me. I was beyond drained, but I could not put this conversation off until later in the week. I invited them to my office. Fortunately, I needed to get one more chair. So, as I was walking down the hall, I felt like I was on my knees the whole time, praying, pleading, and begging God for wisdom.

They explained the situation. I hurt for them and with them. It was traumatic. I was not sure what else to say. Then I asked a question. It is not the question counseling textbooks would suggest, but it changed the session. It brought comfort. I share all of this because I prayed for wisdom and God showed up! I thought God would give me answers, but He gave me a question. I learned that counseling may be more about asking the right questions than having all the answers.

Through the following decades of serving the Lord, James 1:5 has become foundational in my life. I love breaking down the verse:

- ***"If any of you lacks wisdom"*** - I clearly qualify. Do you?

- ***"Let him ask God"*** - This does not exclude training, but it is a beautiful invitation from God that He is approachable and willing to get involved.

- ***"Who gives generously"*** - He does not hold back.

- ***"To all without reproach"*** - We all hate asking some people for help because we know they will mock us. God does not criticize; He welcomes us and shows kindness.

- ***"And it will be given him."*** - This is a beautiful promise.

I still regularly pray for wisdom in counseling situations, but I also pray for it in my daily walk. This verse and promise apply to your schedule, finances, relationships, and career. Pray for wisdom and watch God show up!

all authority is from Him

DEVOTION #5 - ELIJAH EDWARDS

When I was younger, I made it very apparent to be a “rule follower.” I looked upon authority in my life and knew that I had to follow them. On my first day of school, the bus driver told us to look forward and be silent; so, in turn, I looked forward and was quiet. I listened to everyone talking and felt it was strange that I was the only one following instructions. Over time, I started to talk to my friends on the bus, and eventually, I even stood! Guess what happened? I would get in trouble for doing so. This started to make me really disrespect authority and not understand why I was in trouble. I did not like their rules and how they enforced them, even from a bus driver. I respected authorities that I agreed with more than those I felt were being too hard on me.

- Take an honest look at your life. What authorities have you had a hard time agreeing with? Which ones do you follow more?

- What makes it easier or harder to follow authorities in your life?

The Bible tells us in Romans 3:23 that we are all sinners. Since we are all sinners, we all have a drive to follow what we want and to be the authority over our own lives. Due to this fact, submitting to authority is hard to begin with.

Read Romans 13:1: ***“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.”***

The opening line that Paul delivers in this passage is an immediate hot-button issue in our country. Regardless of where your political views lie, reading that instantly makes us think about how hard that already is to follow. I know for myself how difficult it is to have faith in what Jesus is commanding us to do.

- Why do you think Paul would be stating this at the beginning of the passage?

Paul writing this would have also been a crazy thing to hear during his time. As a reminder to us, Rome was torturing and killing Christians. The Jews were also being persecuted by Rome after Jesus had risen. Hearing that they must ***"be subject to the governing authorities"*** would have been nearly impossible to hear without being confused.

Read Matthew 11:28: ***"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."***

Jesus tells us to come to Him for all who labor and that He will give us rest. If Jesus promised this, then let us look again at Romans 13:1, specifically the second sentence, ***"For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God."***

Paul tells us that there is ***"no authority except from God."*** That means there is no governing authority on this Earth that has not been established by God for His purposes. We have seen this back in the Old Testament with Egypt, Babylon, and Persia. We see this today as well. Regardless of where you stand politically or your opinions on the matter, there needs to be a question:

- Do you have faith and rest in the fact that Jesus has full authority over all things?

- Do you have faith and rest in His promise that all authority on Earth is from Him and used for His glory?

embraced by grace

DEVOTION #6 - DAVID HUDGENS

"And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God." Galatians 4:6-7

This passage speaks to our amazing identity in Christ. We are no longer bound by the chains of slavery to our former lives, dead and cut off from our relationship with God the Father. Instead, we are fully adopted as sons and daughters of God, with all the rights and privileges that come with this status.

As I ponder this truth, I am reminded of a personal story that beautifully illustrates this truth. Before my wife and I were married, she quickly became a beloved and endeared member of my family. It was specifically my father who, with an open heart and warm embrace, welcomed her in as if she were his own daughter. In fact, his love and affection for her were so genuine that I often joked to my siblings that she was his favorite child.

Just as my father did not make my wife prove her worth or earn his affection, our Heavenly Father does not require us to work or earn our status as His children. Rather, we are given this incredible privilege because of our faith in what Jesus accomplished on the cross. Romans 8:14-17 reinforces this truth, stating, ***"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we***

are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ."

Our adoption into God's family is a deeply personal and transformative reality. As heirs, we share in the inheritance of Christ Himself. This inheritance is not something we achieve through our own efforts or merits but is a gift shared with us by the grace of God. When we come to God by faith in Jesus, receiving our new identity as His children, we are set free from the fear of inadequacy or the pressure to earn God's favor. We are able to confidently live as beloved sons and daughters, secure in the knowledge that our Father's love for us is unchanging and unconditional.

I challenge you today to live, not as someone striving to earn God's acceptance, but as a child who has already been accepted and beloved by Jesus. Embrace your identity as an heir with Christ, fully equipped and empowered by the Spirit. Let this truth transform how you approach your relationship with God and with others, living in the freedom and security that comes from knowing you are His dearly beloved child.

LESSON FIVE

OUR ADVOCATE

PASTOR KEATON WASHBURN

As we continue our study of the promises of God, we come to a very specific promise that Jesus Himself spoke of very clearly. This is the promise of the Comforter in John 14:16-17, or who we would more commonly call the Holy Spirit.

1. What are your experiences with the Holy Spirit? How aware of the Holy Spirit are you? Where do you hear from the Holy Spirit most commonly?

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2. How have you seen the Holy Spirit taught incorrectly or misused?

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The English version of the Greek word used here for the Holy Spirit by John is “parakletos,” or “paraclete.” Translators often translate it as a couple different words, even here in John chapter 14.

3. Look up John 14:16 in a couple of different translations. What are the various words for the Holy Spirit here translated into across the versions? Why do you think that is?

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4. What are the nuances of each of these words? What does each of these words draw out about the Holy Spirit?

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If you are reading out of the ESV (English Standard Version), you will see the word ***“Helper,”*** translated in John 14:16. The word helper

can have positive and negative connotations for us. Sometimes, it is used for someone important who plays an integral role in making something happen; without their help, something would not have been possible. Other times, a helper can be used to refer to a child who just needs something to do, so they are given some trivial task to keep them busy.

5. Which of these possible uses do you think Jesus is using when He calls the Holy Spirit ***"Helper"***? Why?

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The NIV (New International Version) translates John 14:6 as ***"advocate."*** It states, ***"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever."*** The NIV continues the idea of help but translates the title as an ***"advocate to help."*** Throughout Greek literature written around the same time, "paraclete" refers to a legal assistant who pleads someone's case in court, therefore functioning as an ***"advocate to help."*** In 1 John 2:1, it refers to Jesus as the advocate for the believer, ***"My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."***

When Jesus was comforting His disciples in the upper room the night of the last supper, He told them that even though He had acted as an advocate for them between the Father, He must leave. However, even though He was leaving, He was not leaving them empty-handed. No, He must leave because someone better is coming. That One is the Holy Spirit.

6. Leading up to John chapter 14, in this same conversation, Jesus tells the disciples that one of them would betray Him. He predicts Peter's denial and tells them He was leaving to

prepare a place for them. What do you think the disciples were feeling as Jesus told them these things?

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The Holy Spirit is not some mystical feeling that bosses people around and tells them to do weird things. The Holy Spirit is not a force or power that is "out there somewhere." The Holy Spirit is one of the three persons of the Trinity and was sent by the Father Himself after Jesus' earthly life. So, what does the Holy Spirit do?

Just a couple verses later in John chapter 14, Jesus says, ***"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."*** The Holy Spirit is not out with His own agenda. No, the Holy Spirit points back to the words of Jesus and illuminates them in the hearts of believers. Why do we often hear the same message as someone else but walk away with a different application? It is because of the Holy Spirit that is in each believer! One of the main distinctions between the Old and New Testaments is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God was in the midst of believers. Haggai 2:4-5 clearly says, ***"Work, for I am with you, declares the LORD of hosts, according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not."*** However, Jesus promises something even better than the Spirit of God in the midst of His people. He says at the end of John 14:17 that the Holy Spirit dwells ***"with you and will be in you."***

7. What difference does it make that the Holy Spirit is in believers, not just in their midst?

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In addition to pointing back to the words of Jesus, the Holy Spirit has many other roles in the life of the believer. Romans 8:14-17 says, ***"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."***

8. Have you ever questioned if you are saved or not? Why does Satan try to tempt Christians into believing that they are not actually saved?

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Romans 8:14 is clear in saying, ***"All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."*** How do you know if you are saved or not? Have you confessed Christ as your Lord, believed in Jesus' death and resurrection, and allowed Him to lead you? If so, let this be your assurance of our salvation.

9. What does it mean to be led by the Spirit of God? Who do you see that does that well?

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As I write this, we just returned from two weeks of summer camp with our River Students. It was an amazing two weeks filled with God's Spirit moving in the lives of the campers. Across the two weeks, we had 18 campers confess Christ as the Lord for the first time, and we had 37 campers who were baptized! These are teenagers making the public declaration of their faith in Christ! One thing I have seen many times in my own life and in the lives of students is Satan tempting them in their lowest moments that they are not

saved. Therefore, a practice I have made is having campers write down the date of their conversion in the front of their Bibles. It may sound cheesy, but it is so important that when Satan comes lying, we confront him with the truth.

The Holy Spirit seals our salvation and assures us of our salvation. He points back to the words of Jesus and acts as our advocate between us and the Father. As we forsake our own ways and choose to follow His, that is proof that we are saved!

NOTES

walking by the Spirit

DEVOTION #1 - CHRIS MONTVILLE

We know that when we come to Christ, our sins (past, present, and future) are paid for, and we are forgiven. However, we also know that the sin we are drawn to does not just go away from that point on. I want to talk about that. Today, we are looking at how the Holy Spirit helps us overcome sin.

Galatians 5:16 says, ***"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."***

In order to not gratify the desires of the flesh (sin), we must ***"walk by the Spirit."*** What does walking by the Holy Spirit actually mean? It is a phrase we have probably heard before, but how do we do it?

I work in IT. I write code all day. It is very easy to let your mind wander when it is just you and a computer screen. If you are not a programmer, you can imagine how boring it may be, and if you are a programmer, you have had moments where you have felt this. In the movie *"The Social Network,"* which is a movie about Mark Zuckerberg and the inception of Facebook, we see a solution to the temptation of being distracted while writing code. We see a few times in the movie someone who is "wired in," as they call it. This means they take turns, and whoever is "wired in" has headphones on, blocking out the surrounding noise, and no one is allowed to interact or talk with them while they are working. They stay wired in for a certain amount of time and then rotate. This shows a commitment to be laser focused. While you are coding, that is what you are doing. You are not listening to the noise happening around you.

When our flesh comes knocking, what becomes our focus? What do we “wire” into? We need a laser focus on Jesus. The role of the Holy Spirit is to point us to Jesus. If we are staring at Jesus, we are walking by the Spirit.

However, this laser focus does not work if we only try it when temptation comes. We must develop a habit of choosing Jesus. We must read His Word. We must pray to Him. We must choose to seek Him in every area of our lives. When we do that, the laser focus in times of temptation becomes easier and more effective. Just like this small strategy turned Facebook from a small start-up to a company worth billions, our small, daily, and intentional steps lead us to become a strong soldier for Christ. It is in those quiet, intentional times that we grow closer to the Lord, which is the only way to defeat sin.

The Holy Spirit helps us overcome sin, but we must allow Him the ability to work in our lives by choosing to “wire in” to Him. Plugging into Him is where we see His power in our lives.

another Helper

DEVOTION #2 - JOSH THAYER

I have a 3-year-old daughter, and she is amazing! She is a total daddy's girl. When I am home, Ellie is basically my second shadow. Wherever I go, she is there. Whatever I am doing, she is doing. She has turned into my little helper. If I am taking out the giant garbage can, she has to have one hand on it to help. If I am cutting up food for dinner, she gets her own fake knife right next to me. It is wonderful having a little helper, even if it is a little more work sometimes.

Today, we are going to look at our own personal helper in Scripture. First, let us look at John 14:16-17. Jesus says, ***"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you."***

In John 16:7, Jesus continues, ***"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you."***

What is Jesus telling us here? He is giving us a heads-up that while He is leaving physically, He is sending someone just as amazing. He is sending the Holy Spirit, our Comforter, our Helper. This is not just any helper; He is God's Spirit living within us.

Now, think about that for a second. We often get caught up in life's stresses and struggles, feeling like we are alone. However, Jesus is basically saying, "Hey, you are not alone! I am sending you Someone Who is going to be with you always." The Holy Spirit is here to guide us, comfort us, and lead us into all truth.

Yet, it gets even better. In Romans 8:26-27, Paul gives us another layer of understanding: ***"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."***

Is that not incredible? Even when we are at a loss for words, when we do not know how to pray or what to ask for, the Holy Spirit steps in. He intercedes for us. He communicates our deepest needs and desires to God in ways we cannot even begin to articulate.

How does this impact our daily lives? Knowing we have the Holy Spirit with us should bring immense comfort and confidence. When you are feeling down, lost, or just overwhelmed, remember that the Holy Spirit is right there with you, ready to help. He is not a distant force. He is personal, involved, and deeply cares about your every need.

As we go about our week, let us make a conscious effort to lean on the Holy Spirit. Invite Him into your decisions, struggles, and joys. Ask Him to guide you, to intercede for you, and to help you grow closer to God.

Remember, Jesus promised this Comforter for a reason. He knew we would need help navigating this crazy, beautiful life. With the Holy Spirit, we are never alone. That is a promise we can hold onto.

the Comforter helps us witness

DEVOTION #3 - KATIE PETTIBONE

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Acts 1:8

To witness is to see an event right before your eyes. For example, when we talk about people who see an event happen, we call them witnesses. However, the Bible explains that witnessing is not just seeing an event occur; it is more than that. As a follower of Christ, witnessing is more of a proclamation to others about the truth of God. As we learn more about the promise of the Comforter, we learn that through the Holy Spirit, we have the opportunity to witness.

In this passage, we understand that the Holy Spirit has power that will come upon the disciples, who will help them witness to all the ends of the earth. The importance of this is to see that Jesus is calling them to spread the Good News! They were to go out into the world and tell others of what they saw firsthand. The purpose of witnessing is for there to be a transformation in people's lives, that they may ***"Repent and be baptized… in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the Holy Spirit,"*** as Peter preaches in Acts 2:38. So, not only is it important to share the truth of God, but it is important that God is present in you while you do it. He is helping you as you witness.

In Acts 2:4, it says, ***"And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance."*** We see here just how amazing the power of the Holy Spirit is that the disciples were able to speak in other tongues to

witness to those who understood. Later on in verse six, the Bible says, ***"And this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in His own language."*** The Holy Spirit was able to change the disciples' speech so that those who spoke differently from the rest could understand what the disciples were witnessing. How amazing is it for our God to provide such power that everyone can see His good works?

The disciples were simple guys who God chose to use to spread the Good News to all the ends of the earth. Take Peter, for example. He was just a fisherman who did not catch any fish one night. Jesus showed up and performed a miracle, and Peter began to follow Him. Peter struggled just as we do in our everyday lives. Peter was not a perfect person; the only One Who is and Who ever will be is Jesus. Yet, Peter was called by God to spread the Good News, and no matter what struggles he faced, he still accepted the challenge. Being that Peter was just a simple fisherman who probably did not grow up learning public speaking, you would think he would not be able to reach many people and witness to them. However, by the power of God, through the Holy Spirit, Peter was able to reach out to people! In Acts 2:14-41, we see Peter speaking to a group of people who were mocking the disciples for speaking in tongues, saying they were ***"filled with new wine."*** Instead of being angry, Peter showed that he relied on the Holy Spirit at that moment to speak through him. Jesus gave him the responsibility to witness to everyone, and Peter did just that. Therefore, we see in Acts 2:42, the outcome of the power of the Holy Spirit, as those who heard Peter's sermon as a fellowship of believers began to gather and grow. In verse 47, it reads, ***"Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."***

The disciples were able to reach to the ends of the earth by the power of the Holy Spirit. More than that, the disciples were not the only ones to receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit dwells in all those who believe. We have the same mission as the disciples did,

and we have a responsibility to witness to the ends of the earth. This can be scary in our world today. However the case may be, we need to be ready at any moment to witness to other people because the Good News of Christ Jesus is not ours to keep and bury away. It is our responsibility as followers of Christ to share this news. God knew it would not be easy for us, and that is why He gifted each and every one of us with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is here to move through us and reach the broken. As followers of Christ, we need to rely on the Lord and His power. If you struggle to witness, pray to God to give you courage and to help you rely more on Him. Always remember that the same Spirit that was within the disciples lives in you, and He has the power to do miraculous things.

sealed with the promised Holy Spirit

DEVOTION #4 - PASTOR MITCHELL HOLMES

One of the things that I have never been able to wrap my mind around is people who look at babies and say things like, “Oh my goodness, he has your nose!” or maybe, “Wow, she has grandma’s eyes!” I just really cannot understand how people can look at the beautiful, precious “potato” of a baby in front of them and discern all of the various features that the baby has and who they came from. I think I am just not gifted in this way. I have a really hard time recognizing these characteristics and attributing them to where they come from. I love babies, and I think they are so precious, but their eyes look like eyes to me. I am incapable of recognizing that they came from someone in their ancestry.

Fortunately for us, much as a baby bears the features and marks of their parents, we, who are the Lord’s, bear the mark of our Creator and Father. The difference is that there is no question or room for confusion if you bear the Creator’s mark. Our passage for today is Ephesians 1:13, which says: ***“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.”*** When we belong to the Lord, we are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

In the ancient world, a seal was massively important in communicating ownership or validating the authority behind something. A letter would be sealed with hot wax and then imprinted with the seal of a king or lord that had sent the letter. This was to let the receiver know from whom the letter was sent and that it had not been seen by anyone but the intended audience.

Paul is using language here that his audience at the time would be very familiar with. What is being communicated in this passage is that at the moment of salvation, a believer is sent a helper, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, being part of the Triune God, helps a servant of the Lord in many ways, but specifically today, we focus on His sealing of our salvation. By sealing us with the promised Holy Spirit, we have been stamped with the image of God. We have the Maker's mark imprinted on our souls. We have been given the unmistakable feature of God Almighty. We belong to no one else but our Heavenly Father. Until the day of redemption, when we will receive our full inheritance, we are sealed by the Spirit, guaranteeing that we are the Lord's and that our salvation will never be taken from us.

Today, reflect on how beautiful it is that God leaves an imprint of Himself on us. He has given us the ability to have peace because we are His. We can rest in the knowledge that no matter how chaotic and painful this world may get, we are only here for a short time. One day, we will go home to be with our Father. We are sealed. We are His. Our future is certain.

how can i understand the Bible?

DEVOTION #5 - NATHAN ELLIOTT

When you make time to read God's Word, how do you prepare for such a daunting task? At times, it can feel intimidating and overwhelming to open the Bible to read and contemplate such weighty and lofty matters. In my personal Bible reading, I often feel inadequate and unable to truly understand and apply to my life what I am reading. That would certainly be true if I had to rely on my flesh alone to grasp what I am reading. Scripture is clear that we cannot understand the things of God apart from the Spirit of God. In 1 Corinthians 2:14, we read, ***"The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."*** Therefore, to rely on our flesh to discern biblical truths is foolish. We must pray and seek for the Holy Spirit's guidance to reveal to us the will of God in Scripture.

In the book of John, Jesus tells us about the role of the Holy Spirit in each one of His followers' lives. ***"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come"*** (John 16:13). This promise to His believers is one that should bring us great confidence in discerning the Word of God, not only in our Bible reading but also in our day to day lives. The Holy Spirit will help illuminate the truth to us when we are battling with our flesh.

I would challenge you when you read your Bible to slow down and take a few minutes to pray. Ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate the truth of Scripture and how you can better apply it to your life. Jesus has

promised to us, as Christians, that we freely have access to the Spirit of Truth, and trying to discern the things of the Spirit apart from the Spirit of God is a foolish task. I hope you are pleasantly surprised to find how much more you will learn when asking God for help!

spiritual gifts

DEVOTION #6 - PASTOR CHUCK LINDSEY

"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit." 1 Corinthians 12:4 (NKJV)

"But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills." 1 Corinthians 12:11 (NKJV)

I freely confess that I do not know how to do it. You might ask, "Do what?" Life! I mean everything and anything. I genuinely feel that I need help in every single area of life. Like you, I have responsibilities and decisions that must be made each day. Like you, I need to lead the people in my life in His ways. Like you, I need to be mentally, spiritually, emotionally, and physically capable. In short, I need an ability that I do not have in order to live life in a way that pleases God.

I have none of this in myself. I am completely and utterly powerless in my ability!

Thankfully, the Lord Jesus, before He ascended into Heaven, made a promise to give us His Spirit. Jesus said that He would give us His Spirit and promised that He would abide with us forever. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all the One true God. This means that when Jesus promises to give the Spirit to us, it means that God is giving Himself to us. This means that we have Him. The Creator of all things lives within us. We have the only One who is wise, Who is all-powerful, and Who sees all things living within us. It is no wonder the Bible says that ***"His divine power [the Holy Spirit] has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness"*** (2

Peter 1:3, NKJV). With God Himself living within us, what could we possibly lack?

In addition to the promise that God would take up His residence in us, the Holy Spirit also promised to give His people special "gifting." These ***"gifts"*** are often seen as our abilities, interests, or talents. They do not come from us; they are given to us by God to be used to point to Him and serve Him effectively. You have (at least) one. Interestingly, the Bible says that every person has been given some gifting from God (Romans 11:29). This means that even the unbeliever has been given a gift from the Lord that is meant to be used for His glory. Sadly, and obviously, many do not use their gifting to glorify the Lord but rather to glorify themselves. Nevertheless, God has gifted them. CEOs, engineers, commanders, generals, teachers, architects, and artists of all kinds have all received gifting from God.

You have been gifted by God. You have. It is one of His promises. Do you know what it is? If so, are you using it to point people to Him? If you do not know what your gift is, I would encourage you to talk to someone who loves our Lord and knows you and ask them what they see. Read Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:28 carefully and see if you see yourself in any of these lists of gifting. Once you know that you have been gifted and have identified what it is, all that remains is to begin using that gift to point to Him!

LESSON SIX

THE COMFORTING PROMISE OF A WAY OUT

PASTOR ROY TOWNSEND

The promise of a way out of your life's troubles is an important encouragement that the Apostle Paul recorded in his first letter to the Corinthians. I would tell you that this verse has been learned by many followers of Christ, and it brings a lot of comfort when we are tempted by the things of this world. The Oxford Dictionary defines comfort as, "The easing or alleviation of a person's feelings of grief or distress." I know that when I am working through a temptation, it brings great comfort to know that He has provided a way out.

1. Do you have things at home that bring you comfort? Why?

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2. Are there other Scriptures that bring you comfort? Which ones?

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It may seem strange to talk about a Bible verse that brings comfort. Many of us think of blankets, pillows, socks, coffee, and warm, heavy foods when thinking of comfort. In 1 Corinthians 10:13, it reads, ***"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."***

The verse starts with a statement that all temptations, troubles, trials, and testings, are ***"common to man."*** Many of us fall into the trap that our temptation, trouble, or trials are so different, that people just do not understand how difficult our temptations are. Well, the Scriptures here are revealing that our temptations are common to every man. When you struggle with addiction, pride, and selfishness, these struggles are common to everyone. They are every person's battle!

3. Do you fall into the trap that your troubles are greater than another person's troubles? Can you explain how and why this is the case?

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4. How does it make you feel if you believe that your temptations are more difficult than someone else's? Is this how we are called to respond?

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Well, the verse continues on and says that ***"God is faithful."*** Here is another part of the verse that seems to bring a lot of comfort to us, but we may not really understand. Many believe that because God is faithful, that means He will answer all our prayers the way we want them answered. God being faithful reveals that He cannot act against His character or His nature. This should comfort us, but oftentimes, we are so trapped by our circumstances or beliefs about our temptations that it feels like God does not care about our situation. However, the promise continues with, ***"He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability."*** I have seen many people use this verse as a way to say, "I have got this," but we must remember that we may have this "with God's help."

5. ***"God is faithful."*** Does this bring comfort, or does this scare you? Why or why not?

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6. Are you an "I got this" kind of person, or "I got this with God's help" kind of person? Explain why and when.

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MacDonald states, “He does not promise to deliver us from temptation or testing, but He does promise to limit its intensity. He further promises to provide the way of escape, that we may be able to bear it.” As I studied this, the ***“way of escape”*** has a military connotation. It is like an army that is fighting and fully surrounded, and then all of a sudden, they see a way of escape to safety. It seems very comforting to me to know that other believers have gone on before me, and they have lived with this promise that He will provide an escape.

7. When you are surrounded by circumstances that seem so overwhelming, do you struggle to see the ***“way of escape”***?

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_____
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8. What are some reasons that people do not use the escape route?

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The last part of the verse reveals that He will provide a way of escape so ***“that you may be able to endure it.”*** Another way of saying this is that you may be able to hold out. God is providing a way for you to hold out or to endure, but these words do not often fit our idea of what God should be doing for us. We cannot be too confident that we can take care of it ourselves, but we cannot be so upset that we will have to hold out or endure it either. McGee writes, “God permits us to be tempted because He knows how much we can take; and He always provides a way of escape if we trust Him and take advantage of it.”

9. Why do we think God’s promises will eliminate our responsibility to endure trouble, trial, or temptation?

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10. Has your comfort been increased by this promise of God? How so?

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NOTES

the Lord will guard us from the evil one

DEVOTION #1 - PASTOR PATRICK BICKNELL

Growing up as a kid, there was one person who I was convinced could defeat anything in the world. That person was my dad. I remember thinking even if the Hulk came to our house and wanted to pick a fight, my dad would have no problem with him. For some of you, that person may have been your mom, brother, or grandparents. It is funny to look back and think about it now as we get older, but when we were young, our confidence rested in that person. We knew no matter what situation we were going through, if we had that person by our side, we were going to be safe.

During our walk with Christ, the Bible tells us that we are going to encounter spiritual warfare all the time. Peter has a telling description of the evil one in 1 Peter 5:8, ***"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."*** These can be scary words to read and can cause us to live fearfully on the spiritual side of things. However, we have to ask ourselves, who is the One on our side? Just like when we were kids, and that hero figure would save us from anything we were going through, who is that person going to be for us now?

Paul addresses this in 2 Thessalonians 3:3 by saying, ***"But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one."*** What Paul does here is so simple, yet so amazing. Before he talks about the evil one, he talks about the mighty God that is on our side. He says God is faithful. Paul is trying to tell us to look to God first before we worry about the schemes of the devil, the spiritual warfare we are going to face, or any other adversaries

in our lives. We need to remember who our great God is. It is such an amazing reality for us that the God who created the universe and the God who sent His Son to the world to die for us is the same God who protects us from any evil in our lives. I hope that this is the confidence you have when you think about the evil one. The words that the Lord is faithful and how He will protect us from the evil one make me think of similar words in Romans 8:31, ***"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?"*** If God is the One who is on our side, who can truly stand against us? Let us hold fast to these words and put our confidence in the Lord, who is faithful.

lead me Lord

DEVOTION #2 - JEANNIE YATES

I was never one of those kids that wanted a pony for their birthday. The truth is, I have always been a little afraid of animals that are bigger than me. One year, I went with a group of women to a camp that had horseback riding as one of the activities. I had been on a trail ride or two in my teen years, so when everyone wanted to try the camp's trail ride, I joined them. I had a sweet, gentle pony in mind, but when I got up to the stables, they gave me the tallest, most giant horse of the bunch! He was also the grouchiest horse. I put on the riding helmet and was placed on the horse with barely any instruction. As the ladies in the group took turns getting settled on their horses, my horse began to get restless. My feeble and amateur attempts at guiding my horse to stay in line failed miserably. After my horse tried to jump the fence, bite my leg, and bite the horse in front of me, I was ready to be done. I was getting images in my mind of being thrown from my horse and trampled. My nerves were shot! So, I quickly got off that horse before the trail ride even began.

The way I see it, there are a few main reasons this horse ride was unsuccessful.

1. I needed to receive proper instructions as a beginner.

2. My horse was stubborn; he did not want to be led.

3. My horse did not trust me as its rider.

Psalm 32:8 says, ***"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you."***

However, this beautiful promise is accompanied by a warning, ***"Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you. Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD"*** (Psalm 32:9-10). The Lord promises to lead us, but we still have to choose to follow, surrender, and trust. It is one thing to hear from God; however, we are called to trust His leading and to obey His commands. Keep that thought in mind as you read the following verses:

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." Proverbs 3:5-6

"Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies." Psalm 25:8-10

"Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Psalm 119:104-105

The same reasons why my trail ride was an epic fail are the same reasons why I can often lose sight of God's path for me. I forget that God has promised to lead me. I do not have to know all the answers. I do not need to see the plan; He will lead.

4. I need to read and follow God's instructions from His Word.

5. I am stubborn; I need to humble myself before the Lord.

6. I must surrender my ***"own understanding"*** and ***"trust in the Lord with all my heart."***

Read the lyrics to *"Lead Me Lord"* by Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir as your prayer today. Choose to surrender to the Lord and trust Him to lead you.

It's hard to take the first step
When I don't know the way
Each turn is so uncertain
I've learned to walk by faith
But You gave me a promise
That You would never leave
You will lead and guide me, Lord, I do believe

Lead me Lord, I will follow
Lead me Lord, I will go
You have called me, I will answer
Lead me Lord, I will go

Your plans for me are perfect
I never need to fear
For though at times I feel alone
I know that You are near
My heart just longs to follow
I'm willing to obey
Take my hand and lead me
I'll follow all the way

Lead me Lord, I will follow
Lead me Lord, I will go
You have called me, I will answer
Lead me Lord, I will go

count it all joy

DEVOTION #3 - PASTOR JOHN CARTER

We all measure trials from a somewhat relative perspective. What I mean is that what might be a trial for you, could quite possibly not be that big of a deal for me. Or it could be vice versa, what is a trial for me may not even be a blip on your radar. In the middle of a trial, it may be difficult to engage in perspective, but have you ever asked yourself, "What is the purpose of this trial?"

If you answered "no," you are not the only one. I am often looking for the quickest way out of a trial and spending little effort examining for a purpose. While I have indeed experienced many difficult trials in life and will most certainly face many more in times to come, I consider that fundamental question a very significant question to address in the middle of a trial. Is there a purpose in the trials of life?

As you read James 1:2-4, consider the purpose of trials that James lays out, ***"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."***

What are some of the obvious purposes that James lays out in the passage? What are some of the not-so-obvious purposes James points us to?

The whole idea of being able to have joy in the middle of the trail has always been a challenge for me. It is safe to say the dots have never connected for me there. However, when I start to include the aspect

of purpose in the middle of trials, it starts to make a little more sense. I can rejoice in the purpose of a trial! The first place James takes the purpose is that in the testing, we gain steadfastness. Here are some synonyms of steadfastness:

- dedication
- devotion
- resilience
- affection
- firmness

So, what is it that we are going to gain in the middle of trials? What is the purpose that James is pointing us to? When we see that amazing hand of God in the middle, or even after the trials, it should point us to the confidence we have in Jesus.

We will see that the purpose is for us to learn to be more dedicated, devoted, and dependent on God. In the purpose of trials can you say, “I am excited to learn how to be more steadfast toward God?”

James pushes even further with this to point us to the fact that when steadfastness has the chance to take its effect on us, we find ourselves in a place where we are content, complete, and lacking in nothing. In other words, we are at peace. This is usually the opposite effect a trail has on my life; anxiety, stress, and fear are the norm. The reason we can end at having peace is because it points us to the absolute completeness of knowing God and knowing that He has it under control, no matter the outcome.

That is why Paul says these words that correlate and affirm James’ words. Philippians 4:4-7 says, ***“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”***

God shows up

DEVOTION #4 - JOANNA MONTGOMERY

I hate admitting any weakness I perceive in my life, and I work hard to overcome it. Do you, like me, ever find yourself working hard to please God? Working to please God is not a bad thing unless it is with a wrong heart. I must consider whether I am working to please God so I will receive a blessing. Am I working to please God because I think it is a requirement? Am I working to please God so others will notice? Or am I working to please God so He receives glory and honor through all that I do? Why am I working? Should I not rest in Him?

In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 we read, ***"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me."***

Paul was telling the people of Corinth that God had not taken away a weakness he prayed God would take away. Instead, Paul accepted this answer that God's grace was sufficient, and gloried in the fact that the power of Christ would be revealed through that weakness.

God does not ask us to do hard things on our own, instead, God asks us to give Him everything. Yes, He wants everything! When we walk with Christ, His strength shines brightest through our weakness. Have you ever actually thought about that? I generally give God some things, but there are a large number of things I tend to hang onto. I hang onto frustration and sadness of something someone said that I take negatively.

When I carry the burden of grief, I need to know it is alright to say, “God, I hurt. I hate this situation. It is unfair. I am miserable. I love you, God, but I am so very frustrated right now.” God’s grace is sufficient. I can rely on His grace.

I can hurt, and rely on God’s comfort. It does not mean I can lash out and hurt others because I am hurting, but God wants us to bring Him our pain. He wants to bear our burdens. He wants us to take on His lighter burden. God promises to give us the strength we will need. It comes from Him.

God is waiting for us to fully rest in Him. He is waiting for us to quit trying to bear our own burdens and sadness and to give everything to Him. He is asking us to give Him our weaknesses. The amazing thing about our weakness is when we give it all to Him, God’s power is revealed through it. God wants us to tell Him we do not understand and we cannot see where He is leading us and to tell Him when we are completely frustrated with our lack of understanding. God will provide for us when we quit trying to do everything for ourselves.

Like Paul, we need to be thankful God recognizes we cannot do everything, and fully believe God’s strength and grace will bring us through our suffering and struggle. When we believe God is the Creator of the universe, and is capable of saving us from an eternity in Hell, then there is nothing He cannot do. We may not understand what is going on, and God wants us to tell Him and trust His plan.

If we will accept our weakness and know we cannot do anything aside from what God allows us to do, then our walk with God will grow and others will see how God’s strength shows up in our weakness.

intercession

DEVOTION #5 - ZACH HONNEN

As we continue through our journey of God's promises, we land on the promise of intercession. This is a deeply important and practical promise of God, but before we can understand that we need to understand what it means. What is intercession?

Intercession is the action of intervening on behalf of another.

When I think of intercession, it reminds me of growing up with my family. On a random day when my siblings and I wanted to watch TV, but we definitely had other things we were supposed to be doing, we would choose a representative to go to our mom and ask permission to watch TV. This was always a sensitive operation, but we needed someone to intercede on behalf of the child faction, and that representative was oftentimes me. At the time, I was short and a little bit pudgy with a squeaky voice, but being my mom's favorite, I was the best option to intercede on behalf of my siblings. Just like my siblings had an intercessor, so do we.

Romans 8:34 says, ***"Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died - more than that, who was raised - who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."***

I know the previous story is a little funny, but the reality is that each and every one of us needs an intercessor. We need someone to stand between us and God, and that is what Jesus is for us. Jesus is the lawyer in the courtroom, who represents us, defends us, and ultimately takes the punishment for our sins upon Himself. Jesus is at the right hand of God, speaking to Him on our behalf and defending us from the accuser through His sacrifice on the cross.

What this means for you and me practically is that in those moments where we feel disconnected from God, where we feel lost and alone, we can remember that Jesus is at the right hand of God. He is interceding for us, and because of that, if we are believers in Jesus, we can seek God in prayer, knowing that Jesus is there alongside our prayers. We no longer are condemned because we have an intercessor who will ***"cleanse us from all unrighteousness"*** (1 John 1:9-10). He is our intercessor. Do not forget it; remember that promise.

rescued

DEVOTION #6 - KATRINA YOUNG

My grandson loves coming to our house during the summer. I wish I could say it is because he loves to spend time with us, but I think it is more likely because we have a pool, and he loves to swim. From the moment he arrives, he is laser-focused on when he can get in the water. He is eight years old now, but he was just a toddler the first time we snapped him into a life jacket. It did not take long for him to gain confidence in his buoyancy, jumping off the side and trying to see how far down he could go before being forced to the top. He felt that with the jacket, he was unsinkable. He would try to dive for rings on the bottom and pop right back up to the surface unsuccessfully. Frustrating for him but a sense of peace for us, the jacket was doing what it was designed to do. One afternoon, he got out of the pool and took his vest off to go into the house. When he came back out, he ran and jumped in the water as he had been doing all day. This time, he did not pop up like before and began to panic. He had forgotten to put his jacket back on. He quickly learned that he had no ability to swim on his own, but it was the jacket that kept him safe and afloat in the deep water.

When I think about this story, I think about my own personal walk. I am ashamed to admit this, but I am guilty of sometimes going full tilt into my day, only to find that I am way over my head in a difficult situation. I am so thankful that my trust is not in the material things of this world but in Christ, who gave us victory over every situation in which we find ourselves. John 16:33 says, ***"In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."*** In 1 John 5:4, we read, ***"For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome***

the world - our faith." My faith has grown by walking through those times and trusting in Him to see me through them.

Christ overcame the world that we could walk through our day to day knowing that He has already been tempted in every way, but did not sin (Hebrews 4:15). Psalm 119:105 tells us, ***"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."*** The Word gives us guidance, when we accept Christ and follow in His Word, we will have victory over sin.

My grandson tried and tested the jacket in every way he could. In doing so, he built a trust that it would always bring him to the surface. Without protection, he would have drowned. I pray that in the same way, he will learn to trust Jesus to bring him through difficult situations knowing that he cannot rely on his own ability. I pray that he will learn to use God's Word to overcome sin and learn to walk by faith.

Psalm 18:16 (NIV) adds, ***"He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters."***

LESSON SEVEN

PROMISE OF A SAVIOR

PASTOR RYAN STORY

Recently, one of my favorite things to do with my family has been playing various board and card games. There is a stark difference between how my wife plays and how I play with the kids. I play to win; my wife plays to help the kids grow in their skills and understanding of the game. For me, if my kids win, I want it to be legit. There can be no fake victory or asterisk. It has to be a legit victory. Over the last few months, I have noticed that my method has been paying off a bit too well. There have been times we have played Five Crowns (rummy-style game) or Qwirkle (color matching game), and I have planned, strategized, and lay down my hand feeling like I just took the game and one of my sons makes a move that pushes them into the lead. There is an odd mix of pride that my sons truly beat me and a sting that only comes when your pride gets utterly stomped on because you thought you had won something. Defeat was, in fact, your last move.

1. Have you ever won something you thought you would lose or lost when you thought you would win?

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While discussing promises, every believer had to know we would eventually get to the promise of Jesus. Too often in a believer's life, we forget that we are known, and we can know, serve, and worship a God who has been the same ***"yesterday and today and forever"*** (Hebrews 13:8). Because the Creator of the universe, our God, has always been the same, that means His plan is rooted in who He is. God's plan is as true, steady, trustworthy, and without detour as He is because God does not change, and neither does His plan. That is true from Genesis to Revelation. That plan is from the moment God gives a person life until they return to ash. God's plan has always stayed the same.

2. Why is it so hard for us to have faith that God and His plan are unchanging?

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3. What is the best way to know God's plan?

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One of the most comforting truths about God's plan appeared even at the moment sin entered the world. It seemed like God's plan was unraveling, and He was caught off guard. Yet, God was in complete control. God Created everything, and it was good. God made man and women after His own image, and He said that it was very good. God fellowshiped with Adam and Eve in a way that we will not truly comprehend until we get to see God face to face. God gave Adam and Eve paradise and gave the command to Adam that he could ***"surely eat of every tree of the garden"*** (Genesis 2:16). God gave humanity everything (including life and paradise) and started His commands with blessings before He commanded restriction because there was a grave warning attached to the consequences. It is amazing that after all the abundant grace God lavished on Adam and Eve, that one "restriction" is what Satan preyed on to bring sin into the world.

4. As a result of Adam and Eve's sin, what were the consequences for all humanity? Is that "fair"?

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At this moment in Genesis chapter 3, it seems like all that God had done was for naught. All the intricate beauty of creation was now stained. The relationship between man and God was forever tarnished. Like me, when I think I scored the "W" playing with my

children, Satan most likely thought that He had finally defeated God. If Satan could not bring down God, he might as well bring down what God loved. Little did Satan know that God's plan was rooted in His character. After the fall of mankind, God Himself is the first recorded preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Genesis 3:14 records, ***"The Lord God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.'"***

While reading verse 14, I could only think about Adam and Eve standing right there. All creation up until this point would have been majestic and beautiful; this included the serpent. We cannot think of snakes or serpents in the frame of reference we have today. In the Garden and in all of the cosmos, all things were good. This beautiful creation of God was cursed and punished because of what he did in such a transformative way. No one punishes in a way that does not alter. I have never punished my children by taking away their helicopters. Why? Because I do not own a helicopter, it makes so much sense that, at this moment, the serpent was transformed into a familiar creature that is slithering and creepy. For Adam and Eve, they witnessed God just lay into Satan! Put yourself in Adam and Eve's "shoes" (I know shoes have not been invented quite yet); they were a part of disobeying God. The three culprits are all standing before God, and the first one to be judged gets turned from a thing of beauty to a thing that is despised. I do not see how Adam and Eve could not have felt the fear of "we are next."

5. What are your first reactions to God's wrath?

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6. Why would forgiveness be the furthest thing from Adam and Eve's expectation from God at this point?

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During this great Gospel proclamation, before God delivered due punishment to Adam and Eve, God made sure He proclaimed the message of grace. Praise God! God delivers grace before He delivers consequences.

7. Why is it so crucial in our faith in Jesus to remember that God is a promise keeper of both wrath and blessing?

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Genesis 3:15 continues, ***"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."***

In the prototype of Gospel preaching, God promised that the war between man and the serpent would eventually be won by the offspring of Eve. The Hebrew word ***"offspring"*** here is *zera'.* The beauty of God's promise in light of the fall is that the "seed" of Eve's offspring would bring about the ultimate defeat of Satan. This promise is the announcement that one day, the Messiah would come and crush Satan with a mortal wound. It is as if God wanted to make sure nothing was mistaken at this moment in time. It was as if God could not wait to preach His plan for salvation. At this moment, as any parent would, God could not wait to tell what His Son would do. At this moment, God told Satan that he had not won anything because His plan promises, ***"The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet"*** (Romans 16:20).

8. How should it make us rejoice to know that God's plan for redemption was always Jesus?

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9. What is significant about God being the first to preach the Good News?

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For God, He promised that His Son's victory would be "legit" and final. This is the promise, even though we live in a broken world that is full of heartaches and hardships, both internal and external. Our current world is the result of sin that entered the world. While it could be easy to focus on the hurt that would come out of that day, we ought to focus our hearts on the promise of the Gospel of Jesus that was also given on that day. The sin that we encounter every day is used by God as proof that we need Him to save us from this world and our hearts. We need Him to rescue us from living a life not knowing Him and His grace for us.

10. Why is God's win in the beginning such an amazing promise to hold on to while we are living in the middle?

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NOTES

eternal

DEVOTION #1 - DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16

John 3:16 is an all-time favorite for a lot of us. It is so simple, yet complete. It starts with God's love being so deep that ***"he gave."*** We know that was no simple act. His Son, Jesus, was sent to earth, and although He lived a perfect life, He died for sin. It was our sin. Although they buried Him, He rose again, conquering death and the grave. Even though we deserve to ***"perish"*** (Hell, Lake of Fire), He offers ***"eternal life"*** for ***"whoever believes in him."***

If we place our faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior, God promises us eternal life. This is such a beautiful promise that John uses the phrase ***"eternal life"*** twenty-four times. Here is a sampling.

- John 3:36 - ***"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."***

- John 5:24 - ***"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."***

- John 6:40 - ***"For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."***

- John 6:47 - ***"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life."***

- John 10:27-28 - ***"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand."***

- John 17:3 - ***"And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."***

If you like a scavenger hunt, geocaching, hide and seek, or Pokémon GO, then I have some news for you. ***"Eternal life"*** is only found in Jesus. In John 6:68, we read, ***"Simon Peter answered him [Jesus], 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.'"*** Searching can be fun, challenging, and frustrating. However, once you find the goal, celebrate and share it with others. Tell people about the journey. Lead them to ***"eternal life."***

In case you missed it, 1 John 2:25 says it succinctly, ***"And this is the promise that he made to us - eternal life."***

the promise of a Savior for all people

DEVOTION #2 - PASTOR JOHN CARTER

Was the promise of a Messiah only for the Jewish people? Were God's promises only meant for a designated few, or was there a greater intent of God's design for redemption? When it comes to looking at God's promises, this is often one of those theological hurdles that we will probably have to address. Which promises are for the Jews, and which ones are for the rest of us? While we may see some particular promises to the nation of Israel (for example, a land that will be their own), there are some promises that were articulated to them as a specific people but were not limited solely to them.

One of those is the promise of a Messiah. The word "Messiah" in Hebrew simply means the anointed one or the righteous one. The Greek word that correlates to this Hebrew word is the word "Christ." The word "Christian" is simply a word that indicates an individual who follows Christ or is following the Messiah. So, how do we know for certain that this promise of a Messiah, a Savior, is not just a promise to the Jewish people but is a promise for all humanity? God's plan has always been about redeeming mankind (humanity). We see the inclusion of the foreigner in many Old Testament stories, and the promises that were given to the people of Israel are extended to these very foreigners. Here are just a few examples of many non-Israelites (Gentiles) who received the promises of God in the Old Testament:

- Abram (later called Abraham) a man from Ur of the Chaldeans, he is known as the father of faith (Genesis 11:28-31)

- The ***"mixed multitude"*** who were freed and joined themselves with Israel coming out of Egypt (Exodus 12:38)

- The inclusion of a foreign woman named Rahab with the people of Israel (Joshua 2:10-13)

- A Moabite woman named Ruth married the son of Rahab, Boaz (Book of Ruth; Matthew 1:5)

- From the Gentile lineage that one of Israel's greatest kings came, King David (Matthew 1:5-6)

- From that same lineage the Messiah Himself was born (Matthew 1:16)

I want to focus on a particular book and a particular passage. Let us go back to one of my favorite books, the book of Isaiah. In Isaiah, there are prophecies of this coming Messiah. It is a book given to the people of Israel. While the promise of the Messiah is most definitely inclusionary of the people of Israel, it is not exclusively for them.

Isaiah 9:1-2 says, ***"But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone."***

I want to show this verse to you in another version that may give it a little clearer meaning. Isaiah 9:1–2 (Brenton LXX En) says, ***"Drink this first. Act quickly, O land of Zabulon, land of Nephthalim, and the rest inhabiting the sea-coast, and the land beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. O people walking in darkness, behold a great light: ye that dwell in the region and shadow of death, a light shall shine upon you."***

Who are the people who walk in darkness? Who are the people who dwelt in a land of deep darkness? Who are they that dwell in the shadow of death? The people who live in the land beyond Jordan, beyond Galilee, are the Gentiles.

In fact, in the same book of Isaiah, a few chapters later, it says:

"Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, 'The Lord will surely separate me from his people'; and let not the eunuch say, 'Behold, I am a dry tree.'" Isaiah 56:3

"And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant - these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." Isaiah 56:6–7

This promise in Isaiah chapter 9 is fulfilled and made true in the book of Luke. Simeon is a righteous and devoted man to God. He is waiting earnestly for the promise of the Messiah. He is very much hoping that his old eyes will get to lay sight of the promise that has been promised to the people of Israel. Simeon is so faithfully confident in the words that God spoke to him that he is found waiting for the promise. What an example for us! Here is what he says in Luke 2:27-32 when he lays eyes on Jesus, ***"And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, 'Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.'"***

Even Simeon knew and understood that this salvation, this promise of the Messiah, the promise of the Anointed and Righteous One, was not just a promise for the people of Israel (although it most definitely includes them). It is a promise for all peoples, a light for those in darkness, even those in deep darkness.

I pray today that if you are in need of hope, a light at the end of a dark path, and a light in the midst of your darkness, you will know where to turn. There is a promise for you! There is a promise for me! It is the promise of the Light of salvation that comes through Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone.

John 1:6–9, 12-13 adds, ***"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world…But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."***

the two kingdoms

DEVOTION #3 - CHRIS MONTVILLE

You are part of a kingdom right now. Whether you think you are or not, you belong to one of two kingdoms.

Colossians 1:13-14 says, ***"He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."*** These verses lay out two kingdoms: ***"the domain of darkness,"*** and ***"the kingdom of his beloved Son."*** I want to break each one down.

What is ***"the domain of darkness"***? It is the kingdom we are all born into because of our sins.

Ephesians 2:1-2, when talking about the Ephesians' former way of life before coming to Christ, says, ***"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 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."***

Later in Paul's same letter to the Ephesians, he says in Ephesians 6:12, ***"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."***

In his commentary, N.T. Wright says, "Paul shares with other New Testament writers, and with Jesus Himself, the belief in the existence of a dark power to whom the human race, and the world,

is subject because of sin - and the belief that, in Jesus Christ, God has defeated this power and is establishing His own kingdom in its place."

What is Jesus establishing?

Mark 1:14-15 says, ***"Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'"***

This verse tells us that the Kingdom of God is at hand.

In Luke 17:20-21, Jesus says, ***"Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, 'The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.'"***

Jesus established His Kingdom when He came down to earth 2,000 years ago. His Kingdom is here, and it is through His work on the cross that we can belong to it. He has delivered us from darkness by paying for our sins and taking the whole wrath of God upon Himself.

In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul adds, ***"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."***

If you believe in Jesus, He has transferred us from the domain of darkness into His Kingdom. Today, reflect on what that transfer was like for you and all that He has saved you from and praise Him for it.

Gospel of peace

DEVOTION #4 - SIERRA COMBS

We have a bunch of “nerds” on staff at The River Church. You know, the type of people who could talk about *“Star Wars,” “Lord of the Rings,”* and comic books for hours. While I do not enjoy talking about these things, I do enjoy teasing them for it. What most of them do not know about me is that I had my own nerdy obsession at one point in my life - Beanie Babies. Have you ever been both proud and yet ashamed of something at the same time? Because that is how I feel about my years as a Beanie-obsessed connoisseur. I like to tell myself that it was okay because I was a kid, but in reality, this phase of my life did not end until I was well into high school. Now, for the record, I did not play with these cute little stuffed animals I had carefully collected, but I did spend hours of my days doing research, buying them on eBay, and waiting in line for hours outside the hardware store on early weekend mornings. I had a giant book of every Beanie ever made with all of their information, and at one point in my life, I could name them all with 100% accuracy and probably tell you their birthdates. I was an avid collector, clearly. Out of the several hundred that I owned, all of which I cherished, I had one clear favorite. His name was Peace, and he was a tie-dyed bear with a peace sign on his chest. As a kid growing up in the 90s, peace signs were everywhere. I wore them on my clothes, doodled them on my journals, and threw my two fingers up in the air anytime a disposable camera came my way. Those were the good old days.

Fast forward to our current reality. We are certainly not at peace. As I write, we are in an election year, which automatically equals chaos. A former president and current nominee was just recently shot and almost assassinated. The Middle East is at war, per usual.

In response, Americans who hate America are burning flags and destroying public monuments, all while bowing down to terrorists overseas. Every time you turn on the news, you hear of another deadly mass shooting. It has even trickled down to my own community. The very county that I live in is still trying to recover from the horrific school shooting that left four students dead just a couple of years ago. Just a few weeks ago, another mentally disturbed gunman opened fire at a nearby park, specifically targeting children before turning the gun on himself. I would be lying if I said that I was not often discouraged by the state of our world. Everywhere we look, people are hurting. Mental illness runs rampant, anxiety is at an all-time high, and suicide rates just keep going up. Where is the peace that the Bible promises? What does God actually say about peace?

I think this is an important topic to study and ponder, and going to God's Word is the most important place to start. The word for peace appears 429 times in the Bible, both in the Old and the New Testaments. Some instances refer to the feeling of peacefulness or being at peace with others. There is plenty of talk of counterfeit peace, both in the past and in the future. As many may know, Jesus is called the ***"Prince of Peace."***

Right before Jesus was taken to be crucified, He told His disciples, ***"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid"*** (John 14:27). He goes further on the subject in John 16:33: ***"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."*** I find these passages so sweet and encouraging because Jesus Himself acknowledges that true peace is more than just a feeling. It is only in and through Christ and His work on the cross that we can have the most important kind of peace - peace with God.

In order to have peace with God, we must understand that in our natural and unsaved state, we are enemies of God. For many, this

can be hard to recognize because they see their good works and feel that their “goodness” can earn their salvation. However, in reality, we are all born wretched sinners. Every good deed we could ever do is nothing but a filthy rag compared to the holiness of God. Because of our sin, we are at odds with our perfect Creator. We can never create peace with God despite how hard we try. But God! God loved us so much that in order to create a path to peace, He sent His only son, Jesus, to live a perfect life and die on the cross for the sins of those who would put their faith in Him. He rose from the dead three days later, guaranteeing our justification. It is just as if I had never sinned because now when God looks at me, He sees the shed blood of Jesus that covers me. It is only through this Gospel of peace that we can be saved. Romans 5:1 tells us, ***“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”***

The most incredible thing about this kind of peace is that it is available and attainable at any time, to anyone, at any place. It is not contingent on our circumstances, and regardless of what is going on in our lives, nothing could ever take away the peace with God once it has been established. The world will continue to rage on in its wars and chaos until the day that Jesus comes back to establish true and lasting peace, but until then, God will give peace to those who trust in Him. The question now is, are you at peace with God?

I'll be back

DEVOTION #5 - GRANT GRIMES

"And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.'" Matthew 20:17–19.

"I'll be back!" is probably being heard in an Arnold Schwarzenegger voice. The promise Jesus gives His disciples here is amazing. The greatest miracle of all and the biggest show of God's strength and might was shown through the redemptive work on the cross. As amazing as this promise is and as often as it is spoken of as a Christian, we often neglect to see this for the exciting thing it is. Too often, we focus on the difficulty in the beginning and do not continue reading. We give up in life before the resurrecting life is spoken of. We lack faith that God will transform and renew us from the sin and struggles of life, but we should not be disheartened. The Good News of Jesus' resurrection never changes; we just have to finish the story to see it.

In Matthew chapter 20, we read for the third time that Jesus would promise the Son of Man (Jesus Christ) would be killed and brought back to life. Jesus makes this statement on the way to Jerusalem. Now, I do not know if you are like me, but if my best friend, teacher, and the Lord of my life told me that the next place we were headed, he would be condemned to death, mocked, flogged, and crucified, I do not think I would be continuing my path to Jerusalem. If you can

imagine the cartoon *"Road Runner"* in Looney Tunes, I would say, "Meep, Meep," and zoom as far away from the danger as possible.

The disciples had to be incredibly concerned and frightened at this moment. You may be saying in your head, "But He rose again. He told them He would." It is a lot easier for us to say that now, knowing the power of God that raised Jesus from the grave, but to them, this was a miracle that topped all the miracles Jesus had performed. They would have to lose Jesus first to see the miracle. Oftentimes, we live our lives this way, forgetting the miracle of the cross for the issues and trials that plague us in our everyday lives. We lose sight of God just like the disciples did in Matthew chapter 20. Their perspective was focused on the trial in the beginning, not the triumph in the end. They had seen Jesus fulfill prophecy and keep all of His promises, yet this one seemed too big of a task.

There are times in our lives when we have to focus on the work of the cross because the sin in our life or the distractions the devil places in our way are overbearing, but the wonderful part of a promise from God is He always comes through. Jesus did die on the cross and suffer the sin of the world, yet He came back to life and offered us life with Him. So, when life gets difficult and the things of this world are all that your mind can think of, remind yourself that not only did Jesus say, "I'll be back," but He showed up in the biggest way possible. We can keep that promise for life.

the beauty of forgiveness

DEVOTION #6 - NATHAN ELLIOTT

The most profound mystery in all the universe is that God is willing to forgive sinful and broken men and women. He is not only willing but eager to forgive us of our transgressions against Him. Not only is God willing to forgive, but He offers us eternity in Heaven with Him, where no tears will be shed or pain will be felt. Revelation 21:4 says, ***"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."*** For many of us, we may struggle to believe that we are worthy of His mercy. In the Christian walk, accepting mercy is an appropriate struggle, but it is not something we need to dwell on constantly.

One of my favorite passages of Scripture is Exodus 34:6-7, ***"The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."*** This profound truth comes straight out of the mouth of God, unsolicited. He wanted the nation of Israel to know that this was His character and nature. However, there appears to be a problem for us here because He will ***"by no means clear the guilty."*** Who is the guilty? That is both you and me because all of us have sinned and broken God's law.

This is where the Good News of the Gospel comes in: that an innocent and perfect Man paid the price of the guilty so the guilty man could walk free. If you feel that your sinful past is too great to

be deserving of forgiveness, you must look deeper at how precious our Savior is. Let me share a quote with you from John Piper: “The blood of Jesus is not precious because it saves us, it saves us because it’s precious.” The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is so powerful, and His shed blood is so precious that God is willing to forgive all that will look to His Son. Where sin has abounded in your past, God’s grace and love are magnified because of Jesus’s death on the cross. Confess your sins to Him today and take comfort in knowing that He is eager to forgive them because by doing so, the precious sacrifice of His Son is glorified even more.

delivered from death

DEVOTION #7 - PASTOR JUSTIN DEAN

There are so many different things that people fear. There is fear of heights, fear of the ocean, fear of public speaking, fear of spiders (mine), and infinite others. One fear that is common to all of humanity is death. Even the passing thought of death is enough to scare the toughest person. It is an inevitability of the human condition, yet humanity's greatest common fear. Why? Well, precisely that, it is inevitable. Or is it? Take a look at two different passages:

- ***"Our God is a God of salvation, and to God, the Lord, belong deliverances from death."*** Psalm 68:20

- ***"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?'"*** John 11:25-26

Because of our sin or disobedience to God's commands, death is a reality that we must face in our fallen world. Our physical body dies, and there is a spiritual separation from God because of His holiness and our lack thereof. God saw this problem, a problem that all humanity faces, and sought to deliver us from it. How did He do it? It was through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus came, lived, and died to take our death away and rose again on the third day, as He promised, showing that He had conquered death. He is ***"the resurrection and the life"*** offered to us, and when we believe and follow Him, He gives us a gift of life forever with Him.

Though we know this to be true, many of us still find ourselves afraid of death. In the face of that fear, it is important to remind ourselves of this promise that God will deliver us from death. We can laugh in the face of death because ***"the resurrection and the life"*** is on our side. Because of the person and work of Jesus Christ, we have deliverance from that which so many fear.

Romans 8:38-39 says, ***"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."***

OUR VISION

Matthew 28:19-20: ***"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."***

REACH

At The River Church, you will often hear the phrase, "We don't go to church, we are the Church." We believe that as God's people, our primary purpose and goal is to go out and make disciples of Jesus Christ. We encourage you to reach the world in your local communities.

GATHER

The goal of weekend gatherings at The River Church is to glorify Christ in all we do! Whether it be through singing, giving, serving, or any of the variety of ways He has gifted us and called us together, Jesus is at the center of it all. We celebrate that when followers of Christ gather together in unity, it's not only a refresher, it brings life-change!

GROW

Our Growth Communities are designed to mirror the early church in Acts as having ***"all things in common."*** They are smaller collections of believers who spend time together studying the Word, knowing and caring for one another relationally, and learning to increase their commitment to Christ by holding one another accountable.

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