

# BIBLE VERSES DEVOTIONAL

50 VERSES OF SCRIPTURE

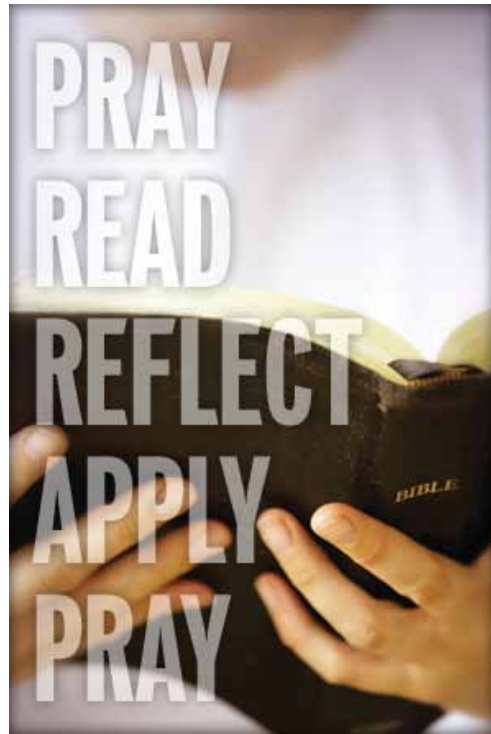


THE BVD

UNDER ARMOR FOR ALL BELIEVERS



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## Aloha!

Thank you for taking part in our Bible Verses Devotional, affectionately known as The BVD (under armor every Christian should have - never leave home without it).

Scripture is such an important part of our Christian walk. Truly God's Word is a lamp unto our feet.

We pray that as you read these devotionals and memorize each week's verse that you will receive comfort, guidance and wisdom. Say them out loud as you practice. This will also be pleasing to our Lord. For it says in Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Memorized Bible verses are like eating vitamins and protein. It will keep our spiritual health strong and directed. The Bible verses I memorized as a teen stay with me even to today.

May this devotional be a life-changing experience for you. May God speak to you and refresh you each week, for He now literally gives you the words you need.

Warmly in Christ,

*Pastor Dan*

## How to Use This Booklet

**Your Goal:** Starting January 17, 2010, along with the entire congregation: To Memorize one verse of Scripture and its address per week; to gain a working knowledge of its meaning; to develop an appreciation of how the verse might encourage, challenge, or otherwise help you to be better equipped for your faith journey; to be prepared at week's end with the entire congregation to repeat the verse from memory in unison at worship — repeating its address both before and after you recite the verse (Remembering *where* in the Bible is important).

**Suggested Plan:** You are free to develop your own plan but it will need to include the elements which follow in this suggested outline: Whatever you do, don't wait until three hours before worship to memorize the verse. If you do you will retain that verse only about three hours after the worship service. Make each verse yours forever.

### Note:

**Scripture cards are included at the back of this booklet. At the beginning of each week, tear off the corresponding Scripture card to help you memorize the verse throughout the week. Collect them as you go so that by the end you have a great set of flash cards to save in your Scripture memory bank!**

**Monday:** Read the devotional for the upcoming verse. Then thoughtfully pray the prayer provided, spending time to make the prayer your own.

**Tuesday:** Spend five minutes reflecting on the verse to discover one new thought — an idea, an insight, or anything the verse may trigger that grabs your personal interest. Jot down a note of that thought in the Tuesday space provided on the opposing page. In that same space write a one sentence prayer connected with your thought. **Spend five minutes memorizing the verse and its address in the Bible.**

**Wednesday:** A repeat of Tuesday but come up with yet another new thought and prayer. Ask God to speak to you. Quiet your mind and soul and listen with your heart. **Spend time memorizing the verse and its address.**

**Thursday:** Pretend that YOU have been asked to write a devotional on the verse. Using your own experiences — the verse as seen through your life today — jot down a few twitter-type notes that carry those thoughts. Pray those thoughts. **Work on memorizing the verse and address.**

**Friday: Review the verse and its address.** You've now committed the verse to memory! You've memorized where it's found! Good for you! Take it with you all day. Pull it up on the screen of your mind throughout the day. Pray for God: To remind you of the verse throughout the day; to strengthen the faith of our congregation as we together reflect on the same few words in the Bible; to aid the pastor preparing the sermon on the verse as well as the worship leaders; and to prepare the hearts of all who will attend the services. **Write from memory the verse and its address in the "Friday" space provided.**

## “A Lamp To My Feet”

by Roslyn Catracchia

### **Memory Verse: Psalm 119:105**

*“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”*

The first Bible I remember calling my own was given to me as a child by First Presbyterian Church. It had a white soft cover, and was presented to me along with my classmates on a Sunday morning in front of the entire congregation. I think I was in the 3rd grade. When it was handed to me, I remember feeling honored to receive something so special. I knew even then that the Bible was no ordinary book.

As a child, I read the Bible every night, and when I was afraid of the dark, I slept with it throughout the night, the soft book tucked safely in my arms. Over the years I began memorizing certain verses that seemed important for me to remember, and I'd write key words in the margins so I could find verses quickly.

I kept that same Bible through high school, when it started to fall apart. Today I have several different Bibles that I turn to for guidance, for direction, to be a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. Without a doubt the most important book in my life, I continue to read each one until it lovingly falls apart and I have to search for another.

While I have read this Book cover to cover several times, and studied it weekly, it continues to both amaze me and be a mystery to me at the same time. I hear different teachings on the same verses. Other verses, no matter how many times they are explained to me, remain an enigma. But even with all the questions, I know that I know that the Word is the Truth.

## PRAYER

Lord, thank You for giving us Your Word. Thank You for giving us teachers and for leaving Your Spirit to reveal to us the many mysteries in Your time. May we never take for granted the amazing gift of the Bible. In Christ's name. Amen.

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## “Rest for the Weary”

by Alice Yoder

### Memory Verses: Matthew 11:28-30

*“Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*

The Miriam Webster Dictionary says the word “weary” means “exhausted in strength, endurance, vigor, or freshness; having one’s patience, tolerance, or pleasure exhausted.”

Does this not sound a lot like life today? We crowd so much into our lives, or life just constantly adds things we cannot avoid, and we grow weary, lose patience and become exhausted. My mother once told me when I graduated from college and soon after was married, “Enjoy your life. You have more time now than you will ever have.” All too soon I found out exactly what she meant. The children came along and I became an all too busy mother. No sooner than I could finally sit down to put up my feet for a minute, a cry would come from a room of the house, “Mommy.” Sooner or later we are all caught up in the whirlpool of life in one way or another with no stopping.

Life today is overwhelming with pressures and responsibilities. We may be given a stressful assignment at our job. Our time clock schedules find us in a situation where the boss is grumpy, and others around us are unreasonable. No wonder one becomes weary.

We find the world today just full of weary, burdened people. People struggling just to make ends meet; people struggling with keeping their homes; people pressured with worry and despair; people impatient with their emotions; and people exhausted with struggling with their loads.

Billy Graham once wrote “Even on vacation, many people rush to cram in as much as they can before returning to their jobs, where they spend twice as much energy catching up on work... that has piled up in their absence. Many of us need vacations just to rest from our vacations!”

In times like these Jesus has the answer: “Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.” In this hectic race of life, it is not easy to find the time to come and spend it with Christ. One must just TAKE TIME. Then one sees clearly that a little time spent with Jesus and His Word will give the rest and contentment that can only be found in Christ. We can roll our burdens on Him. He is the ultimate rest, the source we need to escape the frustrations of life around us. We just need to rest in Him, and let Him take care of the future.

## PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ in whom we find True Rest. Remind us to take time to rest in You. May we help others to seek and find this perfect rest that only comes from You. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

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## “Blessing Mom”

by Patti Marshall

### **Memory Verse: Numbers 6:24-26**

*“The Lord bless you and keep you; and the Lord make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.”*

In Numbers 6, the Lord instructs Moses to have Aaron, his brother and first High Priest of the Israelites, and his sons bless the children of Israel with this prayer, a priestly blessing or benediction. It’s a blessing that is recited to this very day on occasions ranging from presidential inaugurations, to assemblies of thousands of pilgrims gathered before the Western Wall in Jerusalem, to the closing of Christian church services all over the world.

God loves to bless His people. He always has in mind our greatest and highest good. He knows we need to be blessed even if we don’t. He wants to keep us with His assurances of life, peace, and success. He makes His face shine on us. His glorious face is the greatest gift we could have because it reveals how pleased He is with us, not because of what we have done but because we love His Son, Jesus.

He is gracious to us, showing tender mercies and care. He looks upon us with His face and nothing but attentive blessings. He gives us peace, His shalom, His wholeness and goodness through the Holy Spirit.

My dad died three years ago leaving his beloved, my mom, to complete life’s journey without him. They had been married sixty-two years. I have the privilege of helping her in these remaining years with personal and financial decisions. She misses him with all of her heart. But she “keeps on, keeping on” as best she can.

Recently, just before a trip to Washington state, I saw her do something I’d never seen before. She lifted an expensive Cross pen that she and my dad shared, kissed it, and said, “I’ll be back soon, Mal. I’ll be back.”

I wept. Her loneliness and my grief overwhelmed me. I missed my dad, and I will miss my mom when she joins him. I prayed this blessing over her and for myself. To know that our triune God heard me, gave me peace and a deep calm in my spirit.

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## PRAYER

God the Father, bless us and keep us. God the Son, may God’s face shine on us and bring us grace. God the Holy Spirit, speak on our behalf and give us peace. In Jesus’ name, Amen.



## “Where the Truly Amazing Happens”

by Rosella Shishido

### **Memory Verse: 2 Corinthians 5:7**

*“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”*

This is one of the verses in the Bible that’s easy to memorize but hard to do. Just when we thought we’ve learned how to “walk by faith,” something so challenging comes up that the faith we thought we had quickly fizzles out.

What does “walking by faith,” mean anyway? I believe it means moving forward to do what we have heard from the Lord to do, even if it doesn’t make sense at the time. It’s trusting the Lord that He is able to accomplish through us what He has set for us to do.

Walking by faith requires an understanding of the Lord and His teachings, which comes from spending regular time with Him in prayer and in the study of the Bible. Having these two disciplines also develops in us the ability to recognize promptings from God and the direction He’s pointing us to.

In the first few days of knowing my husband Michael, I got an impression from the Lord that he was “the one.” How can that be? At that time, he wasn’t even a Christian! It totally made no sense. But after much prayer and fasting, and a series of events that only the Lord can pull off, God showed me what He had in mind for me: a future with Michael in which we would raise a family that would love, obey and serve the Lord. “For we walk by faith, not by sight.”

More recently, at a time when we were getting various mailings from possible colleges for our son, one postcard stood out because of an impression I got as I held it: “This is the one.” But how can that be? I haven’t even heard about this college. Can we afford the tuition?

Several days later, I learned that it was not only a Christian university but U.S. News and World Report ranks it consistently among the ten best regional universities. After much prayer and overcoming many hurdles, we enrolled our son there. God made it all possible. “For we walk by faith, not by sight.”

We know that a prompting or a message is truly from the Lord when He makes it all happen despite our inabilities to make it happen. There will also be peace about it in our hearts.

A heart full of faith in the Lord is where the truly amazing happens.

## PRAYER

A life with You, Lord, is where amazing things happen, and only because You are the amazing God. All-powerful, all-knowing, all-present. Nothing is ever too difficult for You. Thank You for including me in Your plans to affect the world. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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## “Woo-hoo!”

by Cory Oliveros

### **Memory Verses: Psalm 100:1-3**

*“Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before Him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God. It is He who made us, and we are His; we are His people, the sheep of His pasture.”*

The Scripture addresses “all the earth.” Not just the nation of Israel, not just priests, not just worship leaders, not just Christians. Everybody! He made us all! So then the whole world should be jumping and shouting for joy as if their favorite celebrity was in their presence! WOOHOO! JESUS!

It’s not always like that here on earth, is it? In fact, it’s not always like that in my own personal worship to God. Why is that? Why is it so much easier to jump and scream and dance at a rock concert? I think it’s because of the fact that I can actually see these celebrities before me. I can hear their voices and see them playing. But with God, it’s not so “in your face.” It’s still, and quiet. That’s the only way to really hear Him sometimes. Sometimes it takes a deeper faith.

You know what I think is true worship? It’s in quiet times when I’m on my knees, listening. At that moment, God sees my heart and my spirit dancing, jumping, and shouting out to Him.

I feel the same way when I get to serve others. Whether it’s leading worship on a Sunday or volunteering at a community event. Put it this way—whenever it’s not about me I feel that I’m truly worshipping God. Makes sense, yeah?

With all that said, the physical and audible expression of worship just comes naturally when I’m living a life of worship. If not, once the music ends, so does my praise.

## PRAYER

Lord, I want to worship You in spirit and in truth. Help me to have a lifestyle of worship. And let my thoughts, words, and actions be pleasing unto You. WOOHOO! Amen.

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## “More Than Skin Deep”

by Ron Mathieu

### **Memory Verse: 1 Samuel 16:7**

*“But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.’”*

Have you ever seen an unimpressive-looking person in a prominent position and find yourself asking, “Where’d HE come from?”

If you didn’t know, would you assume dystrophy-stricken Stephen Hawking was one of the most brilliant theoretical physicists of his day? I wonder if most people who encountered Mother Theresa, Gandhi, or even Jesus in their everyday walk would just pass them by as inconsequential by comparison to Brad Pitt, Michael Jordan, or Bill Gates.

The reality is that fancy packaging is a natural phenomenon and human pitfall for the very reason that it is so effective. Billions of dollars are spent to entice our eyes and many decisions are based on external factors. This is true for supermarket items, dating criteria, job hiring, buying a home, and even the church you might attend.

This is a reason God often uses clay pots as holy vessels. He would rather use the unlikely candidate, the rejected, and those who have messed up as the instruments of His purpose. Why? So that there will be no doubt that it is God who is at work.

The Bible is full of examples: the widow who set the example for stewardship; the Samaritan who showed true mercy; the persecutor Paul who became the foremost apologist of the Christian faith; the simple fisherman Peter who denied His friend three times but was also the rock on which the church was founded.

This is not to say that good-looking, talented, and successful people cannot find God’s favor. Of course, they can. Despite his lowly station, David turned out to be tall and handsome, a courageous warrior, a talented poet and musician, and an extraordinary king. And God’s anointing, we discover, did not make him immune to serious sin, including adultery and murder.

The point is that we are often fooled into judging by what’s on the outside rather than the inside, and we need to make sure we make decisions based on faith, integrity and character, not attractive appearance.

Finally, if you’d like for God to call on you for His special purpose, consider that He usually picks people who know Him, who are in relationship with Him, who despite their flaws try to follow His way, and who are reliable and ready when needed.

## PRAYER

Father, I pray that You would give me Your discernment to help see people’s hearts rather than judge them by appearance, and that I can be found acceptable by the same measure, in Christ’s name, Amen.

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## “The Perfect Gift”

by Pastor Drew Hulse

### **Memory Verse: Micah 6:8**

*“He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”*

Do you struggle with buying gifts? You know what I mean, trying to buy just the right gift for someone? All of us have been in that situation of buying a gift for our fathers, especially later in life when material things mean very little. Imagine if Bill Gates was your father, what are you going to buy him? Of course, what throws us off is thinking that buying just the right gift is somehow the way we communicate our love for a person. If that is our belief then we have fallen into a trap that is hard to be freed from.

That is the situation that Micah is speaking to. The Israelites had missed the boat on what it meant to please God. If you look at verses six and seven, Micah makes a list of “things” that would be futile attempts at pleasing God. He is the king of overstatement as he lists the extravagant gifts a person might consider offering to God. Can you imagine offering 10,000 rivers of oil, even our first-born? Needless to say, I think Micah wants us to know that there is nothing physical we can bring to God that will earn His favor.

So what is it that will please God? Micah lays it out very clearly: to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. Notice that all three of these are active phrases. They aren't things that are done passively. What God desires for us is to be actively engaged in responding to Him by giving our lives in love. What that looks like could be a myriad of things, but it is not sitting on our thumbs.

Remember we started with trying to buy a gift for our fathers and how difficult it is. How awesome it is to realize that our father doesn't want another tie or weed-whacker, he wants to know how much we love him. And our Father in heaven wants the exact same thing—a loving relationship with His creation. Pretty cool, huh?

## PRAYER

Father, teach us each day to have humble hearts, to have hearts that seek after you. Give us the courage to do justice, to see the world as you do and to respond actively in love. Reveal yourself in us. Amen!

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## “Never Out of Tune”

by Ron Mathieu

### **Memory Verse: Romans 8:28**

*“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”*

For many years my understanding of this verse was that even in the midst of crisis or struggle, God works everything out.

But over the years I’ve come to a deeper insight: that this assurance is conditional; we must love God and be called according to His purpose for all things to work together for His good. It requires movement on our part. When we love God, we automatically are in tune with the purpose for which we were created (to love Him), and accordingly resonate with His eternal plan that stretches back to creation and forward into eternity.

The tuning/resonance metaphor helps me comprehend this mystery. My guitar’s natural state is to go out of tune. I can play a sharp or flat note that can be harsh to the ear. But in the hands of a master musician, the strings can be stretched to harmonious tension, and discordant notes can be arranged in beautiful, melodic unity that is not apparent in isolation.

Similarly, because of our sinful nature we seem to easily slide out of harmony with what God wants for us, and isolated crises make it hard to perceive God’s hand in our circumstances. The cross became God’s eternal tuning peg, and the way He realigned our discordant sinful lives into beautiful harmony. The only requirement to become part of this symphony is to love the Master Musician. He will take care of the rest.

This is blessed assurance, and it’s also an incredible inter-connector of all personal, global, and cosmic history. When we make a decision to love God, and in that light connect the dots of Old and New Testament with our current times and lives, they form the unmistakable shape of God’s hand!

In acknowledging that God is the Creator of the symphony, I have come to the conclusion that it’s better that things work out according to His purpose than to my desires. I realize that things that don’t please me can benefit me, and even have an eternal effect on someone long removed from my time or consciousness. It mysteriously connects my failure to become a college professor with someone who comes to know Jesus Christ through First Prez long after I have passed from this life!

Take the time to examine the threads of your life, and I think you’ll find they often contribute to a tapestry of a much grander design.

## PRAYER

Lord, I confess that I often place more value in my desires than in Your purpose. Help me to see Your hand in my distress as well as my deliverance, and to trust that You know what You’re doing, in Christ’s name I pray, Amen.

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## “Delightful Desires of the Heart”

by Dee Dee Lee

### Memory Verses: Psalm 37: 4-5

*“Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.”*

Heart’s desires are important. Psalm 37:4 says that if you delight in the Lord, He will give you the desires of your heart. The key follows in verse 5, committing your way to God, trusting Him and waiting for Him to show you the way.

As a young mother I felt I didn’t have enough hours to do everything I needed to and was overcommitted to many things. And not all of them were faith-centered or even things I’d prayed about. So my dilemma challenged my family life and my faith. In my experience, until I was able to surrender those things I thought I wanted in my life, and until I prayed for God to show me what He wanted for me, my heart’s desires were unfulfilled. If I’d prayed over Psalm 37:5 and committed my way to the Lord, my plans would have reflected His plans for me.

Do you feel at loose ends or overcommitted to things demanding too much of you? You might need to ask God to show you if the choices you’ve made are ones He wants for you. In Jeremiah 29:11,13 (NIV) God promises - “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.... You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” Your future is in His hands.

If you don’t feel fulfilled, ask God what it is He’s planned for you. Seeking what God wants for your life can be a turning point in your faith and your trust in Him. When you commit your life into His hands and trust in Him, He will not disappoint you. It just might bump your faith up to a new high as He gives you your heart’s desires. As Corrie Ten Boom wrote, “Let God’s promises shine on your problems.”

My life today is exciting as I delight in the Lord. Psalm 1:2a shows the blessing of following the Lord: “They delight in doing everything the Lord wants; day and night they think about his law.” (NLT) Delighting in Him is a measure of obedience as well as a matter of devotion. I know He is faithful, patient and loving beyond measure. I’m thankful for the ways He’s corrected, blessed, warned and strengthened me as my Savior and Lord. And He is giving me the desires of my heart!

## PRAYER

Lord, My future is in Your hands and Your love for me a constant blessing. I commit my ways to You and trust You to give me the desires of my heart. Amen.

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## “Bes’ Kine Kanikapila”

by Randy Lau

### **Memory Verses: John 14:2-3**

*“In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”*

As a young man, I was given the opportunity to travel across the U.S. mainland to play racquetball on the pro tour. I was always excited about the tournaments and the experiences that came with it. Regardless of how well I fared, I was always happy to return home after traveling.

I can remember vividly walking up the little lane toward our house hearing the sound of Hawaiian music and familiar laughter. My dad played ukulele in a music group and had friends and family kanikapila (parties) seemingly all the time. The feeling was almost euphoric knowing that I would soon be a part of the celebration. It was a combination of feeling comfort, safety, thankfulness and happiness because of the music and laughter. It was a place of belonging. The house was built with bricks and wood, but it was the spirit that dwelled within it that made it home.

Jesus is telling us in John 14:2-3 to trust Him and thus, to trust God. By doing this, we will not only be with Him but we will dwell with Him. There is permanence. We will dwell not in a building or structure as we know it, but rather in an eternal place with Him and with God. And there is room for more! In this place, I can only imagine the feeling of the purest love, the ultimate comfort, never-ending laughter, extreme happiness, and the divine music of heaven.

Our journey on this earth is short. It comes with strife, turmoil, hardship, trial, sickness, sadness, addiction and defeat. It is filled with highs, lows and uncertainties that result from a fallen world. By trusting in Jesus, we find God and we can overcome these temporal things and look forward to things eternal. We are promised a place with Him when we trust in Him with all our heart. I see it as coming home from our earthly journey to be with our heavenly Father, with Jesus, and with all our Christian brothers and sisters. We will dwell in a spirit of warmth, love, peace, and joy forever and ever. This is the “bes’ kine kanikapila!” What a homecoming it will be!

## PRAYER

Jesus, when I am troubled, worried, and stressed, help me focus on and trust in You and put my feelings to rest. I am thankful that through You, I can come home and dwell with God forever and ever. In Your name, Amen.

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## “Anointed to Proclaim Good News”

by Pam Chun

### Memory Verses: Luke 4:18-19

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

Wouldn’t you want to see these as the headlines some day?

#### GOOD NEWS!

Today, someone has come to give the poor hope and help!

Today, someone will release every person held in bondage to a new life of freedom!

Today, someone will give sight to every blind man, woman, and child!

Today, someone will stop the oppression that robs people of their freedom!

Today, someone is telling all of us that things look favorable for the rest of the year and none of us have to worry about being judged!

That would be big news indeed. But, would the newspapers print it? Would radio, TV, the Internet, Twitter™, and Facebook™ latch on to it? Would it go viral on YouTube™, have a guest spot on a talk show? Would the media in all its forms pick it up and spread this good news? Maybe they would, maybe they wouldn’t. We can’t be sure.

But here’s one thing we can be sure of. No matter what the media says, no matter what others say, we can spread the news! We can be the headlines. We can make the headlines in other people’s lives simply by following in Jesus’ footsteps.

We can be good news to those in need and lift them out of their poverty, whether it be material, spiritual or emotional poverty. We can spend time with those who are shackled and bound by the “no you cannots” of life and bring them a freedom that they have never known before. We can help people see the world through the eyes of Jesus and give them new sight. We can be men and women, girls and boys who share the generous favor of God with every person in our path.

If the Good News is that good, why keep it to ourselves? In fact, how can we keep it for ourselves? Why wait for others to publicize it when we have the opportunity and privilege of doing it now?

## PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank You for being the good news in my life. Thank You for lifting me out of my spiritual wasteland and giving me headline news that I can take to other people as good news in a small word, a meaningful deed, and a listening ear. I pray particularly and specifically for the people I will encounter today. Anoint me with Your Spirit so that they can see Your favor. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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## “How To Live Forever”

by Michael Shishido

### Memory Verses: John 11:25-26

*“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in Me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die.’”*

In the 1500’s, Juan Ponce de Leon went on a quest to find the so-called “fountain of youth.” People have been searching for an elixir of this type for hundreds of years. Man is so uniquely obsessed to beat the life system, it seems we stop at nothing to achieve everlasting youth.

At last check, no one’s been able to find this mythical fountain. And research has shown that at some point, everyone dies anyway. Your body, like it or not, with all its wrinkles and excesses and blemishes, will someday succumb to death or disease. No one escapes this.

That’s not to say you shouldn’t take care of yourself. You should. Eat right, exercise, get good sleep. Devotional disclaimer: I am not a good example. Witness my love for apple crisp and staying up late. Walking our dog 30 minutes five times per week is a good start. Your body is, after all, a temple. And we are commanded to “glorify God in your body.” We really should take better care of ourselves in general.

But what if you could live forever? What if your body’s seeming imperfections didn’t matter? The good news is, you can live forever. Your body may pass away, but you are more than just your body. Your soul and spirit live on. And Jesus says the answer to achieving everlasting life is quite simple.

Believe. Jesus says it himself. “He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.”

But Jesus says it again in an even bolder statement. “Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.” That’s about as simple as it can get for cause and effect dynamics. If you believe, you will live. If you live and believe, you will never die.

We search for the secrets to life and longevity on this earth. But our real home and focus should be heaven. It is there that we will live out the rest of our existence, beyond life on earth. We can look forward to eternal life, thanks to the resurrection and life that is Jesus Christ.

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## PRAYER

Heavenly Father, with this prayer, I boldly state that I believe in You. I put my trust in You and I dedicate my life to You.



TUESDAY

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## “Who Is Your Giant?”

by Karen Makishima

### **Memory Verse: Joshua 1:9b**

*“I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”*

No matter how old I get I just can’t seem to shake the fear factor.

As a young child I was afraid to go to Kindergarten. Just when I seemed to have conquered that fear, another one reared its debilitating head. My dad STRONGLY encouraged me to overcome my fear of heights by making me jump off the high dive. I remember how my palms would sweat as I climbed each rung on the ladder. The line of impatient pros behind me would only add to the pressure. As long as my dad was watching, turning back was not an option. Each baby step that I took to the end of the board was so painful. The voice inside of me would continually tell me, “I can’t do it,” while my father’s voice was completely opposite. But once I made the jump, I loved it! I could do it!

I wonder how many blessings we miss out on due to our fears that we perceive as “giants in our land?” In the book of Numbers Moses sent out twelve spies to check out Canaan, the land God promised them. They all saw how the land flowed with milk and honey and even produced luscious fruit. But ten of the spies voted against entering the land due to the giants (their perception) inhabiting the land. What made Joshua and Caleb different? Joshua knew that the God who had been with Moses was going to be with him, too. That same God would not fail him or forsake him (Joshua 1:5b).

As I grow older I continue to have giants in my life, such as the fear of failure and fear of not being liked. That debilitating voice from childhood is still there telling me that “I can’t do it.” But I also have a stronger voice from my Heavenly Father who STRONGLY encourages me to make the jump. That same God that was with Moses, Joshua and Caleb is with us commanding us to, “Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9b)

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## PRAYER

Heavenly Father, We thank you for your voice of truth that wants us to experience your blessings. Help us to recognize Satan’s voice and not allow our fears or giants to rule in our life. We want to be strong and courageous. Thank you for never failing us! In Jesus’ Name, Amen.



## “The Blessing of Persecution”

by Laeton Pang

### Memory Verses: Matthew 5:11-12

*“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

“You’re too religious. Patients wouldn’t appreciate that,” said my medical school interviewer as he summarily dismissed me from his office. I wish I could say that Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:11-12 had provided me with comfort. Truthfully, I was feeling sorrier for myself than thinking about heavenly rewards. God was gracious, however, and I was accepted into medical school the following year.

Paul tells us in II Timothy 3:12 that “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” Jesus reminds the disciples in John 15:20, “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.” Dave Stotts (Drive Thru History) and others have argued that faithfulness despite persecution was a major factor in how the early church grew so rapidly.

The author of Hebrews expands on how God’s people suffered for their faith (Hebrews 11:32-37), including that “others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they may gain a better resurrection (v. 35).” Persecution, including martyrdom, is still a prominent feature of Christian life in some parts of the world, although American Christians have largely escaped persecution because our country’s forefathers had the wisdom to include freedom of religion as a first amendment right.

I find the contrast striking in the beatitudes between how Jesus defines being blessed and what most think when we say “God has blessed me.” Beatitudes are declarations of blessedness. It’s easy to lose the eternal perspective of what blessings are because we’re so materially rich in this country. Jesus underscores what’s really important when he corrects the disciples in Luke 10:20: “Don’t rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

Whatever heaven’s like we can be sure that it’s a great place where we’ll live in direct communion with God for eternity in heavenly bodies not subject to sadness, sickness or death (Revelation 21:3, 4). In the beatitudes, Jesus says that there will be rewards in heaven for how we lived here on earth. In Matthew 6:19 and 20 He warns, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”

Forever is a long time. There’s no comparison between infinity versus two days, five months or even 120 years. What’s a little suffering and sacrifice relative to the long-term gain?

## PRAYER

Thank you, Lord, that we live in a country where we’re free to worship. Help me to rejoice in what’s truly important and to be faithful should I face persecution.

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## “Anything Means Anything”

by Pastor Drew Hulse

### **Memory Verse: Philippians 4:6-7**

*“Do not worry 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.”*

It’s marked in my Bible. The date is May 28, 1973. That means that I had been a Christian for about four months. I don’t remember a lot about those first months of walking with Jesus, except for the fact that I had fallen into a new community that loved me, put up with my questions, encouraged me, and spoke truth into my life as I was learning to walk this new life in Christ. Along the way, as situations would arise, different friends would point me to scripture for God’s direction in my life. New promises were being discovered every day and Philippians 4 was one of the big ones.

Paul tells us not be anxious for anything. Some translations use the word “nothing.” That tends to be a pretty all-inclusive word. Aren’t there some things I should worry about? Does God really expect me to turn everything over to Him? Is there nothing we should hold onto? Paul’s simple answer is “nope!” “Do not be anxious for anything.” Pretty cut and dry, but especially difficult for those of us who have perfected the art of worrying.

I read something the other day that said that 85% of the things we worry about never actually happen. 10% of the things are out of our control. And that leaves only 5% of the things that we can actually have any control over. And yet, we worry about everything. Paul tells us to let it go and to do so with thanksgiving, because the God of the Universe is ready to handle it and give us His peace in return. Not a bad deal if you think about it.

I have no idea what I was worried about back in May of ‘73. But I do know one thing, this promise of God has stayed with me ever since. I’m sure glad I am willing to trade off my worries for God’s peace. I really think I got the better end of the deal.

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## PRAYER

Father, forgive us for how good we are at worrying. Lord, we give to you all that burdens us and makes us anxious. Thank you for how you are going to show your Lordship in our lives through these issues. And thank you Father for your amazing gift of peace. Amen!



## “A Real No-Brainer. Or Is It?”

by Tom Stirling

### **Memory Verse: Romans 6:23**

*“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus Our Lord.”*

Paul’s pithy pronouncement reminds me of a TV game-show choice. Some nattering emcee announcing that behind Door “A” is some wages with consequences, and behind Door “B” is a gift.

Which would you choose? If you knew the true consequences, the choice seems obvious. Who wouldn’t prefer eternal life with Jesus to ignominious death?

The word “wages” sounds so benign—just an appropriate reward for worthy efforts. I think of the summer jobs of my youth. Clerical work, mowing lawns, baling hay, construction, counselor at a Boy Scout camp, Army service and eventually law practice. I got to really enjoy the experience of getting periodically paid. Well-earned paychecks for honest toil (or at least I hoped so).

But the wages of sin are something else. They don’t show up as a paycheck, or as anything tangible. They show up more like a judgment. “No less than death,” says Paul. That’s a pretty serious verdict, and who wants that?

Instead, we have a choice. We’ve been invited to accept God’s incredible gift of “eternal life in Christ Jesus Our Lord”. How do we do that? Is there something specific we need to do? An oath to take? A ritual to perform? A number to call? A receipt form to fill out and send in?

How about just telling God in your own way? Out loud or silently. Alone or with someone special. With friends or family. Privately or on stage at church. Just assert that you accept His incomparable gift, and do so at any time and in any way as the Spirit may move you. Just acknowledge that God so loved us that he sent His only son Jesus to save us, that through Him your sins are cancelled, and that His stunning reward is eternal life with Him. There’s no job application or entrance exam. No references or resume required. No down payment or entrance fee. He’s already pre-paid it all—just for you.

Trust that He’ll hear you, as He hears every authentic communication.

Just tell Him, “I’m in, all in!”

## PRAYER

Dear Lord, thank You for the incomparable gift of Your Son, Jesus...the One Who came to take away the sins of the world; the One who came to pay a debt He did not owe—for a debt I could not pay. I acknowledge Him as my Lord and Savior and I say to You today, “I’m all in, Lord. I’m all in.” In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

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## “No Worries!”

by Pastor David Stoker

### Memory Verses: Matthew 6:26

*“Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”*

Last summer I enjoyed the choir’s special rendition of Meredith Willson’s musical comedy *The Music Man*. It was so much fun and highlighted the talents of our incredible choir. In the Broadway production there is a serious scene where Professor Harold Hill, the fly-by-night con artist, expresses genuine love to Marian the librarian. But Marian is always looking to the vague future, never quite living in today. Hill tells her, “You pile up a lot of tomorrows, and you’ll find a lot of empty yesterdays.” Professor Hill may have been devious, but he understood the importance of the present.

Reverend Edward Everett Hale, former US Senate chaplain, said, “Never attempt to bear more than one kind of trouble at once. Some people bear three kinds—all they have had, all they have now, and all they expect to have.”

Jesus tells us, “Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things” (Matthew 6:34). So why worry? Jesus said that it’s futile to fret, for worrying can’t change anything (Matthew 6:27). We need to remember that our heavenly Father knows all about our situation and watches over us (verse 28-34). We can be sure that He will take care of our needs no matter what tomorrow brings.

I have discovered that 90 percent of the things I’ve worried about never came to pass. And when what I had feared did occur, God’s grace was always sufficient. Then why worry? It is the most mindless thing in the world for the Christian. This does not mean that we should thoughtlessly rush ahead in life. There is a big difference between foolish worry and wise, thoughtful preparation for the future. To eliminate worry, we must face the coming problems and responsibilities with faith, trusting God for His grace and provision.

## PRAYER

Lord, we know that worry can often consume us and yet You tell us not to worry or be anxious about anything. You encourage us to not let our hearts be troubled. Instead of letting worry fill our hearts and lives, teach us to cast our cares upon You, for You truly care for us. With that in the foremost of our thoughts and minds....how can we then worry or fret?

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## “To the Ends of the Earth”

by Pam Chun

### **Memory Verse: Acts 1:8**

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

I love in this passage how Jesus so clearly reminds us that the ability to be His witness lies in the Holy Spirit. He says it’s not about who we are, what we can do, or how we say it. It’s not about the details of our lives, nor any phenomenal before/after testimonies, nor does it involve any fantastic spiritual gymnastics. It’s about being empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria – those were scary places for believers in Jesus’ time. Jerusalem was where the Holy Temple stood and the religious authorities ruled. It was where Jesus was crucified, a most unwelcome place for those that followed Him. Judea and Samaria represented territories, pieces on a map in which the disciples were political, religious and social outcasts. And the ends of the earth? Well, that took the cake because Jesus was saying that the disciples would go way out of their comfort zone, to walk among people whose language they did not know, whose currencies they could not fathom...and they would be His witnesses?

But. But. But. Jesus does not say, “If you go to Jerusalem, if you go to Judea, if you go to the ends of the earth.” He says instead, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.” He says, “ You will be my witnesses.” Jesus says it’s not a conditional question of whether we receive power, but rather a question of when.

Before He was crucified, Jesus called the Holy Spirit the Comforter, the Counselor. That gives us a picture of the Holy Spirit being so close to us that it can put its arms around us to comfort us and whisper counsel in our ears. After Jesus rose, He adds another dimension: the Holy Spirit as empowering.

Is that a relief to you? It is to me. It says to me that it’s not my power, but God’s. It says to me that I can “let go and let God.” It says to me that I don’t have to wrestle up the work, but I can rest in the power of the Holy Spirit to be the engine, the gas, and the nuclear reactor that makes my life as a witness possible even to the ends of the earth.

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## PRAYER

Holy Spirit, empower me today to be the person whom Jesus knows me to be, a person who can testify with my life to His saving grace and love wherever He sends me. In Jesus’ name, Amen.



## “Opportunities to Wait and Hope”

by Pastor David Stoker

### Memory Verses: Isaiah 40:31

*“But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”*

The scripture for this week is a poetic description of the soaring of eagles. The Jewish people were in exile and it is likely that every one of them had looked up at the sky, seen eagles soaring, and cried out to the Lord to give them the freedom of the eagles. They desperately needed assurance that God was still in charge and that He cared about their plight. Isaiah the prophet was trying to give them encouragement and so he said these words:

*Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. He gives strength to the weary. And to him who lacks might he increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, And vigorous young men stumble badly, Yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles. They will run and not get tired. They will walk and not become weary.*

The Jewish people were ready to give up, and Isaiah was trying to tell them that God’s power and strength was available to them. And God’s power and strength is available to each of us, just as it was to God’s people in exile. I think for example, the family who receives the word of cancer in a loved one and finds the courage to go through the “valley of the shadow.” Or families who are going through devastating infidelity, and know humiliation and insecurity, but also know that they do not stand alone. A rebellious teenager, the death of a spouse, or deadly depression presents an unwanted opportunity to “wait and hope” for the strength of the Lord.

I know there are times when we feel tired. Even our souls are tired. And in times like these I find the last part of verse 31 so helpful: *“They will run and not get tired, they will walk and not get weary.”* This is an important placement of words. We would probably have said that the phrase should be “walk, run, soar.” But instead Isaiah said, “Soar, run, walk.” All of us soar occasionally. It’s the feeling you had when you asked her to marry you, and she said yes. Or when you found out a new baby was coming; when you got a great new job; or when your child was accepted at his or her college of choice. We soar at moments like that. But we can’t live life soaring all the time.

Sometimes life can seem like we are plodding. Most of us do more walking than soaring. But life can’t always be soaring; it is mostly plodding. But God is with us in the walking, as well as in the soaring. The young people may even fall out, exhausted. But don’t worry, God is big enough to handle all our circumstances, when we take it one step at a time.

## PRAYER

Father, there are times when I am weary and tired. But I can sense Your presence as You renew my strength. You are there in the midst of my “plodding” and my “soaring.” May I trust You to handle anything that comes my way. For You are faithful. You are trustworthy. And I can always count on You to carry me on Your loving wings. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

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## “A True Non-Conformist”

by Peter Millard

### **Memory Verses: Romans 12:1-2**

*“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to HIM—this is your spiritual (reasonable) act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

In my BC days (before I came to Christ), I epitomized a hedonistic, worldly, materialistic, irreligious person. Starting in high school, through college days, my time as a naval officer, high school teacher and fledgling businessman, I personified the amoral, carnal, rebellious lifestyle.

When my first marriage shipwrecked and I struggled through the crucible of divorce, I embarked on a spiritual quest that led to my eyes being opened to the Truth. I realized that the faith I was exposed to as a young person was truly the Way. Jesus was really the Son of God, and He had paid for my sins. Slowly the process of sanctification began.

But how was I supposed to discern what He wanted me to do with my life? What was a living sacrifice? How was I supposed to renew my mind? God gave me a second chance at life, and I did not want to blow it this time. “How then should I live?” as Francis Schaeffer asked.

I was determined to overcome my selfish, sinful nature. Only the Holy Spirit could affect a change in my behavior and program my mind to focus on “whatever is true...noble...right...pure...lovely... admirable... excellent and praiseworthy” (Phil.4:8). Only the Holy Spirit could free me from the prison of sin. Having once been an over the top non-conformist in a worldly sense, I am now a different kind of non-conformist, living my life according to God’s plan for righteous living. The peace which comes from this radical shift in the focus of my life and the resulting change in my character is only possible through the presence of the Holy Spirit in my life.

God is transforming me through His amazing Grace and mercy. He did it for a wretch like me. He can do it for you.

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## PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I ask that You keep encouraging us to continue to be transformed by the Holy Spirit, resulting in the manifestation of the Fruit of the Spirit in our lives. Keep us from being squeezed into the pattern of this world. Give us the wisdom to discern what You want us to read, watch, and listen to, so that our minds will be truly renewed. Amen.



## “The Greatest is Love”

by Roslyn Catracchia

### **Memory Verse: 1 Corinthians 13:13**

*“And now faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”*

By the time I was 16, I knew what my favorite verse in the Bible was. Actually, it was the entire thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians. One evening when my dad and mom came into my bedroom and saw me reading, my dad asked, “What are you reading?” I said, “The Bible.”

When he asked me to read something from it, I had difficulty figuring out what to read out loud to him. So I said, “I’ll read to you my favorite part.” And I proceeded to read out loud:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7, 13)

When I had finished and I looked up, my dad was crying. I asked him why and never in a million years did I expect the answer I got. He said, “Because I don’t think I know how to love.”

A very long story follows, and I can’t go into all the details. But that evening, by his own choice, my dad left our family, and my mom began the incredible journey of raising two kids on her own.

My mom never left us guessing if she loved us. She told us often, and it was never an empty phrase. I grew up knowing my mom loved me. And I grew up knowing that God loved me. But it made me sad to think that my dad not only didn’t love me, but didn’t feel that he knew how to love anymore at all.

When I turned 21, I found out from my dad’s secretary that he had been in a coma in Japan! I was furious! I found the number and called the hospital. He was weak but was getting stronger. I scolded him severely and said that I didn’t care if he had moved out years before. He was still my father and I still loved him. I told him that I never ever wanted to find out anything about him from his secretary again.

We had a great talk that night. At the end of the phone call, he said, “I love you.” It was the first time I remember ever hearing him say it. I hung up, stared at the phone and started crying. It was the beginning of healing for both of us.

I Corinthians 13 is still my favorite chapter in the Bible. And I pray to always learn how to love more deeply, more completely, and more fully with the love of Christ.

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father, You loved us so much that You gave Your only Son for us. Teach us to love each other with abandon as You love us, freely and completely, never holding love back. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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## “Zero Degrees of Separation”

by Pam Kennedy

### Memory Verse: Romans 8:38-39

*“For I am convinced 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.”*

There is a theory, popularized by sociologist Stanley Milgram in the 1960’s and later verified by Columbia University Professor Duncan Watts in 2001, dubbed “six degrees of separation.” It claims that if a person is one step away from each person they know and two steps away from each person who is known by one of the people they know, then everyone is at most six steps away from any other person on Earth.

It’s an interesting theory, but it’s not very comforting! At best it reminds us that we live in a “human web” populated by strangers to whom we’re mysteriously connected. We may never meet these other people and they probably aren’t concerned about us. Although we’re connected, we still remain separated, lonely souls in an impersonal world.

For 28 years, my husband and I lived the life of a Navy family. We moved 19 times, uprooted from family and childhood friends, continually wrenched from neighbors and Bible study partners, transferred away from close-knit small groups and church fellowships, repeatedly changing schools, homes, and communities. Our three children learned to make friends quickly, but not too closely because there were always “good-byes” waiting down the road just a short distance from the “hellos.”

And then there were the numerous deployments lasting from six to nine months each. Sometimes it was difficult to feel connected when we were apart for anniversaries, birthdays, Christmases, school plays, skinned knees, parent-teacher conferences, and the births of two of our children. The military calls these periods in a family’s life, “being separated.”

The amazing thing is, however, that throughout all those years, we were never really separated. Unlike the unfortunate individuals caught in the human web of Professor Watts’ “six degrees of separation,” we had the assurance that “nothing could ever separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:39b) Wherever we were, God was with us, around us, in us. That’s the amazing reality of living a life empowered by Jesus Christ.

As Paul reminds us in these verses, there is nothing we can experience or imagine that can drive a wedge between us and God’s love. When friends move away, when we face betrayal, or even death, Scripture assures us that we are eternally near the One who is the constant and caring Head of our family.

## PRAYER

Dear Father, thank You that nothing can separate me from Your love. Please remind me that when I’m feeling alone and overwhelmed, You are right here with me, promising to never leave. Amen.

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## “Every Tear Gone”

by Pam Chun

### **Memory Verse: Revelation 21:4**

*“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”*

Isn't that what we all want? Someone to wipe the tears from our eyes. Someone who knows how much we are hurting on the inside. Someone with whom we feel safe sharing the deeply buried wounds, who sees the scars that never seem to heal, and understands the pain that we keep hidden because it hurts so much.

We want someone who has felt the sorrow that feels like a hard, heavy stone in our hearts when we have lost people we love. We want someone who will hold us when we've made mistakes we can't take back and which make us cry, "It's too late, it's too late."

That person is Jesus.

When the apostle John wrote these words at the end of the Book of Revelation, he was well aware that life is not full of pain but, as the Dread Pirate Roberts in the movie, *The Princess Bride* says, "Life is pain." There is no escaping it. John himself had seen and lived through pain. In the course of his lifetime he had buried all his friends (he was the last of Jesus' disciples) and was living in exile on the island of Patmos. He had experienced Jesus leaving not once but twice: first when He was crucified and died, and then again after Jesus was resurrected when He ascended to the Father. John knew heartache.

And yet, God gave John this amazing vision – that one day every tear shed over every sadness and sorrow and loss in our lives would be wiped away by God Himself. There will be no more tears because, as John writes, "there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain." Zero, zilch, nada, zed. Gone forever.

When I think about someone wiping every tear from our eyes, I think of parents. When children fall, parents pick them up, clean the dirt from scraped knees, and wipe away tears, every last one. And of them all, wiping our tears is the best part, the thing that makes us feel the best. It tells us that it's all over.

In the same way, when God comes in and wipes away every tear from our eye it will be because it's all over. We will have fallen no more. Alleluia!

## PRAYER

Lord, thank you that You know us, love us, that you see our pain, and bend over us tenderly even now. Thank You for Your promise of eternity in which there will be no more mourning or crying or pain, a new order in which the only tears we have will be tears of joy. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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## “A Story For the Ordinary in Us”

by Stephanie Castillo

### **Memory Verse: Psalm 127:1**

*“Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain.  
Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain.”*

When I saw the DVD *Faith Like Potatoes* on the shelf at Blockbusters, I was put off by the title and passed it by many times. Then one day as I searched for a DVD, God spoke to my heart, “Watch this one.” And so I did.

*Faith Like Potatoes* is the true story of an angry, tough, need-no-one South African farmer whom God turned around. Burned out, resorting to tranquilizers, and alienating his family and workers, Angus Buchan one day finally gave up and finally let God in.

God took his heart and exploded it with hope, visions and possibility for the Kingdom. Angus vowed to get to know his God, and spent days lying beneath corn stalks, which he called his “green cathedral”, reading the Word. And out of that came transformation. Angus dedicated himself, his family and farm to God. And God took them. And he blessed them. And he used them, and continues to still, 30 years later.

Today, ordinary farmer Angus Buchan, and his family have at their farm, named Shalom (peace), a home for orphaned or abandoned children, and an agricultural school based on biblical principles. The Buchan’s Shalom Ministries helps grow food for the locals, creates employment, and has a mission to grow men up in Christ.

Angus himself is a minister for the Gospel. He has preached Jesus all over Africa, and as far as Jerusalem, from a huge, yellow, 20-ton truck equipped with a stage, lights and sound; the only word printed on its sides: “JESUS.”

God has used Angus to do miracles and healings, but he says his primary thrust is evangelism – preaching the good news to every creature. He once was asked to go to London to preach to downhearted farmers who were losing their farms and cattle on account of the mad-cow disease epidemic. His simple and powerful message? Trust God.

Angus’ life shows us that when you stop building your “house” alone and your kingdom for yourselves, and give it to the real Builder, miracles can happen to the most ordinary of us. When Angus stopped being the “watchman” over his kingdom and let God lead him in his new life in Christ, the farm and household and life that he struggled to keep afloat became God’s. How the story of God’s servant Angus Buchman inspires and blesses us!

## PRAYER

Oh Lord, take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee. Take my moments and my days; let them flow in ceaseless praise. (From the hymn “Take My Life”)

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## “Guidelines for a Godly Nation”

by Pastor Dan Chun

### Memory Verse: 2 Chronicles 7:14

*“If My people who are called by My name humble themselves, pray, seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”*

This Bible verse gives four practical guidelines on how Christ-followers can be good citizens and have a blessed nation. It’s not a bad checklist for our daily walk with Jesus.

#### 1) Humble yourself.

Humility is one of the core values that we seek to embody at our church. Humility is seeing life as it really is. We’re probably not as bad as we see ourselves, but we are not as great as we think we are either. Humility is willing to be transparent about our faults, but also realistic about what we have really accomplished with God’s help. Hence, humility gives us a thankful heart, giving credit to God for all the good things in our life. God blesses America not because we deserve it but because He is full of grace.

#### 2) Pray.

If God is our Creator then we should converse with Him daily in prayer. If it is true that 90% of our world’s troubles is due to miscommunication, then we should talk to God as much as possible about everything. How’s your prayer life?

#### 3) Seek God’s face.

It’s not just about talking to God, but it’s also about seeking His face, meaning His will. We want to do His will and not ours. We want to seek the pleasure of His countenance.

#### 4) Turn from wicked ways.

Finally, we need to be people of repentance. When we have detected that we have done something wrong, we must seek restitution and ask for forgiveness from the Lord and from those we have wronged.

If we are not repenting in our lives, then perhaps we have not been seeking God’s face; perhaps we have not been praying and perhaps we have not been humble at all.

As you memorize this verse for the week, spend Monday thinking about the area in your life that needs more humility. On Tuesday think about the depth of your prayer life. If you don’t pray daily, ask yourself, “Why not?”

On Wednesday determine if most of your prayers are about you, as opposed to seeking God’s will, which might be different from yours. On Thursday, ask God if there is something you need to repent of. On Friday, pray for our country, that we might be a humble, praying, God-seeking, repenting nation. For only then will He heal the land that suffers from pride, greed, racism, affluence, and other challenges.

It all starts with us.

## PRAYER

Lord, may we be a nation and a people that truly seeks Your face. Help us be a humble, praying, repenting people. Forgive our debts as we forgive our debtors.

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## “Two Chairs”

by Pastor Sim Fulcher

### Memory Verses: Ephesians 2:8,9

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — not the result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

Have you ever tried to explain to another person what saving faith is? If you have, you’ve no doubt found that it’s not as easy as it may seem.

Out of the whole Bible these two short verses focus in on saving faith more clearly than any other single place in the Bible. They were probably the first verses I memorized after I came to have saving faith. However, I found that simply repeating them to another person was like handing them a full cup with no handle. I needed a handle. Then I heard a pastor explain these verses to another person in an unforgettable way — a way that gave me the handle I needed to pass the truth of these verses on to others.

The pastor was speaking to another person whom I shall call “friend”. The pastor used two chairs. The pastor was sitting in one chair. The other chair was empty. The friend looked on. The pastor began the conversation:

“Friend, you see that empty chair there? It looks strong and sturdy. Do you believe it will hold you?”

“Yes, I believe it will hold me.”

“Don’t let me insult your intelligence, but is that chair holding you up now?”

“No, of course not.”

“How would you get that chair to hold you?”

“Why, I would have to go over and sit in it.”

“Exactly. You see, the way you believe in that empty chair is the way many believe in Christ. It is intellectual faith but it is not saving faith. It was that way with me. If this chair I’m sitting in represents my life and that empty chair represents Christ there, was a time when I believed everything about Christ, but I was trusting in the good works of my life—prayer, Bible reading, church going, giving to the needy, keeping the golden rule, etc.—just as I’m resting in this chair. My faith was in myself, not in Christ. The word “faith” in the Bible comes from the Greek “pisteuo.” It means, “rest upon” or “trust in.” It means much more than “know about.” Having saving faith means I have—just like I’m moving from this chair to that empty chair—transferred my hope of eternal life from myself to Jesus Christ. Now my trust is in Jesus Christ alone. That is saving faith.”

As you memorize these two verses it’s a good time to renew your trust in Jesus Christ.

## PRAYER

Lord God, I acknowledge my need for Your forgiveness and I renew my trust in Jesus Christ alone for my salvation. Thank You for giving me your gracious gift of eternal life. Amen.

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## “God is Faithful”

by Ann Kai Millard

### **Memory Verse: 1 Corinthians 10:13**

*“No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing He will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.”*

Is there any difference between a trial, a test, or a temptation? The Greek word is the same for all three, but Bible translators differ on the one they choose. No matter which word is used, it is true that none of our lives is free from trials, tests or temptations.

Difficulty and pain seem to be an integral part of our human condition. Our journey through life may have mountain peaks of great joy and blessing, but there are also the deep troughs of hurt, rejection, loss and woundedness. We may successfully hide these dark places from others and ourselves, but they remain, and affect the way we think, feel and behave.

This word from Paul promises us that God will not test us beyond our strength to withstand the pain, and He will provide a way out. What an encouragement! Trials are part of God's process of purifying and strengthening us. He strips away our old life and puts us on a new path.

If I had not walked through the pain of divorce, I might never have come to the place of helplessness and desperation, which led me to the feet of Jesus. It is not that I was not familiar with all the Bible stories of my childhood. But none of them really taught me that what God wanted was a relationship with me through Jesus. It was only through the devastation of my marriage, the shattering of my sense of identity and the pain of abandonment that I began to ask new questions. What was this life all about anyway? What was I here for? Obviously, I was failing miserably.

It was only in this incapacitated condition that I was forced to look outside my own ability and self-sufficiency for the answers. It was only in this depleted state that God finally got my attention. He began to pick up the broken pieces of my life and showed me how to put them together again. He sent me friends who were also searching for Him and friends who had already found Him. It is God who provided the way out, and I realized that the Way was Jesus. If it had not been for the severe testing of this experience, I would never have surrendered my life to Jesus.

Yes, God is faithful.

## PRAYER

Lord, You are an amazing God. You can use the dark, painful stains in our lives for Your glory. You can take the trials and use them to build spiritual muscle in our hearts. Nothing is ever lost or useless in your eternal plan and purpose for us. Thank You. Amen.

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## “My Three’s”

by Rosella Shishido

### **Memory Verses: Psalm 46:1-3**

*“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.”*

I once took an Internet quiz (on Facebook) called, “My Three’s.” It asks for three truthful responses to each given topic where your answers allow others to learn more about you.

One topic is, “Three Places I’ve Been,” which most people respond to by listing places they’ve visited. But I answered differently. Three Places I’ve Been: (1) In the middle of a major earthquake, (2) In the middle of a hurricane, (3) In the middle of a coup d’etat. All true, no kidding! But it was in the earthquake experience where the first three verses of Psalm 46 ring true the most.

July 16, 1990, Manila: I was working in a radio station high up on the 19th floor when a 7.7 magnitude earthquake shook the earth massively. The glass walls rattled and the whole building swayed. Co-workers were screaming, crying and running for cover. As the only Christian in that office, I ducked under a desk and quickly prayed, “Lord, if someone were to die, let it be me and not the others.”

And yet, despite the chaos, and my own fear, I also sensed an inner reassurance. It was an unusual combo of feelings. Somehow I just knew that God was present and that He was in control. If I were to go, He’d be there to receive me. If it weren’t my time, He’d make sure I made it down safely to the ground floor.

Psalm 46:1-3 is our reassurance that God is present even when our world is being shaken, literally or figuratively. He’s not only present but also ready to help, to give protection, rest, relief and means to restore our strength so we can move on.

Picture the Lord lowering the drawbridge to let us into His stronghold when we are threatened or afraid. He is that strong tower we can run to for safety when danger approaches (Proverbs 18:10).

Looking back to my list of “Three Places I’ve Been,” I think I can very well give the same responses if the topic was, “Three Places Where God Protected and Saved Me.”

If you were to respond to that, what would your three’s be?

## PRAYER

My Lord and My Savior, I praise you and I thank you for being my ever-present help in times of trouble. You are my refuge, my safe haven, my sanctuary where I can find rest and peace.

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## “New Creation”

by Pastor Drew Hulse

### **Memory Verse: 2 Corinthians 5:17**

*“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”*

The fall season not only brings a change in the weather, it also begins a whole line of holidays we like to decorate or dress up for. The first in line for these is Halloween. It is always fun to answer the door and see who has come to visit. I think the best part is to see what they have done with their costumes. Did they go straight for store bought? Did mom make it? Did they rummage through the closet and just see what they could come up with? Or, as one of our visitors did this past year, just recycle the exact same costume as last year? Yes, “Celery Man” came to our door two years in a row.

What, might you ask, does this have to do with being a new creation? Everything is the answer. Isn't it great news that God has promised that those who put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ, those who have believed in the name of Jesus and accepted Him into their hearts, become “new creations?” Our heart, the very essence of who we are, is made brand new. New life begins instantly. God doesn't just cover over our old, sinful self with some temporary plastic mask; He brings us into a brand-new life. We become a part of this brand-new thing that God is doing in the world through Christ.

So often when we look at our walk with Christ, we want to hold on to all of our old stuff, our attitudes, our grudges, our hurts and fears, and just hope that God will recycle some of it and make it all okay. But the truth is God calls us into a new life, and it is the Holy Spirit that begins the transformation process from day one.

When we give our lives to Christ we have turned our lives over to a new Designer. How awesome it is to know that the Creator of the universe is now the One that is making us new, renewing us daily, giving us a life beyond what we could have ever imagined.

Put away the old stuff; it is dead and gone. And get ready to experience something new.

## PRAYER

Lord Jesus, help me to let the old go and live out of the new each day.

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## “Perspiration/Inspiration”

by Pastor Sim Fulcher

### **Memory Verses: Hebrews 12:1,2**

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

Our granddaughter Liz has competed in swimming at a high level. Her mother told us recently that Liz was begging for a \$500 swimsuit—a Laser suit. It’s the pick of all the pros, Michael Phelps included. The suit is seamless. It covers the body like a membrane—so thin and fragile that it lasts only weeks. What’s the advantage? There is zero drag. In fact, I understand that the suit is so drag-less, it’s becoming illegal. Drag is a horror word in the racing world—swimming, running, skiing, biking, etc. It was also a factor to be reckoned with in the sporting world when the Book of Hebrews was written.

Those who first read Hebrews were familiar with the early Olympic races. They knew exactly what was meant by “lay aside...the sins...”. It could easily read, “get rid of anything in your life that has drag.” In fact, it’s a neat way to define sin in our lives — anything that gives the slightest drag in keeping me from doing and being my best for Christ, but there’s more here in this passage.

Any successful athlete has to deal with the mental as well as the physical. I’m speaking of “inspiration.” Inspiration can be contagious. Our son Mark and his wife took a tour last summer fulfilling a long time ambition—following on their own bikes, the famed Tour de France. He loved the scenery, the great French hotels, and of course the thrill of seeing legendary bikers up close and personal. What was the highlight of the two weeks? Mark said by far it was the day he pedaled alone up Mt. Ventoux, a day’s journey from the Paris finish line. It’s well known to all the Tour de France competitors. He climbed the grueling hill that rises above the tree line—the hill that often decides who takes the Tour de France trophy—as if he were competing in the real thing. He said it was tremendously inspiring.

So for us, we are on the very race track upon which Jesus Christ ran—and Paul, Peter, David, Abraham, and Moses. Whenever we climb a grueling hill in our faith journey we can be assured many have been here before us. It’s an exciting race. Keep pedaling and don’t forget about the drag.

## PRAYER

Lord, thank You for the faithfulness of all those who have gone before. Help me to be true to those who are watching me. Amen.

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**“Trust Me!”**

by Julie Carter

**Memory Verse: Proverbs 3:5-6**

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”*

“Trust” is a concept we understand and practice every day. We trust that the sun will rise in the morning and that there will be sound when we turn on the radio. We trust people—or not? The daily news reminds us of our trust, or lack of it, in the government, in science, and in the safety of our food. Whom or what can we truly trust?

This passage reminds us to put our trust in the Lord, something I have been aspiring to do most of my life. These verses have been my chosen “life verses” since I was a teenager and I was amazed to have them “randomly” assigned for me to write about.

Throughout my life, I’ve noticed it is so much easier to say that we trust God than to practice it. Why is it so difficult, especially if one is aware of all the amazing things God has done, from the miracle of creating the universe to the miracle of knowing/loving each of us individually?

Perhaps the clue lies in the next part: “...and do not rely on your own insight.” I value education, logic and insight. I consider myself an analytical thinker. Yet one translation said, “...never rely on what you think you know.” Ouch, this is something that contrasts my personal way of thinking. So I have to be reminded over and over again that I don’t always know, and that God’s ways are not our ways. We have to acknowledge whom He is and that He is in control, not us.

God has proven He can be trusted in the scariest things as I went through cancer three times. I experienced that He could indeed make my path straight when He led me through many steps to attain a life-changing job. I continue to learn daily that He can be trusted even in the small things.

As I wrote this, a PBS program was focusing on the effects of the economy pertaining to ordinary folks. Women and men from all walks of life were filmed in a hair salon sharing how they’re coping. I was startled when someone said that he just trusted God, adding, “the secret of the saints was to surrender everything to God and let Him take over.” (Was this a coincidence or a God-incident?)

**PRAYER**

Thank you, Lord, that You are so trustworthy. Give us the faith to trust You more each day, even when we don’t understand how You are working in our lives. We know that You love us and want only what is best for us. We love You, too! Amen.

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## “It’s Not About Merit Badges”

by Pastor Drew Hulse

### **Memory Verse: Galatians 2:20**

*“And it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*

My scouting career was not a glorious one. In fact, I think it lasted less than six months, so I might not speak with much authority here. I actually progressed pretty quickly through the program. I still remember getting my Tenderfoot and my First Class patches. Along the way I picked up the necessary merit badges that allowed me to pass from level to level. But I realized something—I didn’t like scouting. I know, I’ve just offended a couple of you, but let me explain. Maybe because of my Scout Master, or maybe it was just me, but I felt scouting was just about acquiring merit badges. As a result, I never developed a love for scouts. I had the wrong focus.

Sometimes we can think that our relationship with God is the same way. Our merit badges are the things we do, or our trying to keep the law. We think it’s all about status and having position, and if we do enough then we will have a special place in God’s kingdom, a better seat at the table.

The Apostle Paul has come to another conclusion. No one is justified by the law. There is nothing we can do on our own to save ourselves. In fact, God wants to do just the opposite. He wants to crucify our old self, our self-efforts, our trying to earn our way to God, and give us a new life. This life we now live in Christ is qualitatively different. It is no longer our self-effort, but it is actually Christ living in us. We live each day by faith, turning over our future, our hopes and dreams, all that we are and placing it in the hands of a loving Savior.

I’ve always liked the image of a tandem bicycle. Many times we accept Christ and invite Him to get on and pedal, while we make all the decisions up front. Paul is telling us that really following Christ is letting Him sit in the front seat and take us on a journey of faith. It’s all about Jesus and we are just along for the adventure. All I can say is put away the merit badges and hold on!

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## PRAYER

Father, forgive us when we get caught up in our self-efforts. Thank you for the new life you have given us. Give us hearts and eyes that are open and ready to enjoy the ride. Amen!



## “His Strength Makes Us Strong”

by Dee Dee Lee

### Memory Verse: Philippians 4:13

*“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”*

Feeling strong in tough times can be a challenge. Only when we turn to God will we find our source of strength.

I’ve had challenges, but time has shown me over and over that God is my “refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.” (Psalm 46:1)

The most poignant time was when my mother was diagnosed with early Alzheimer’s and rheumatoid arthritis in her 70’s. I was able to travel to California frequently enough to get her moved and make sure her physicians communicated with me. Friends in her church family were willing to check on her weekly. With my long distance responsibilities and as her only child, I had to count on God to provide strength and hope for both my mother and me. He never let us down. As Elisabeth Elliott wrote, “He never allows us to undergo anything for which he has not promised the strength to endure.” That was true for myself and my mother, as we both counted on God and the support of special Christian friends who walked alongside of us.

What challenges are you going through? Maybe you’re struggling with your faith, not finding any answers, or finding doors closed when you thought a breakthrough was possible. Remember nothing is impossible with God. He is ready to strengthen you and give you endurance and hope. In 2 Corinthians 12:9, Paul reminded the Corinthian believers what Christ can do, and did in his life: “So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may work through me.” His power can help you meet challenges with wisdom and strength.

One of my most special gifts is a silver bracelet. An inscription of Philippians 4:13 is inside it. The givers didn’t realize how much that verse meant to me. It was the verse God wanted me to consider precious as a faith marker in His relationship with me.

If things worry or try to overwhelm you, remember to count on God’s power as you read the Bible, and seek prayer and counsel from those in the Christian community He has given you. You will never walk alone if God is the anchor of your life. And “...those who wait on the Lord will find new strength...fly high on wings like eagles...run and not grow weary...walk and not faint.” (Isaiah 40:31)

## PRAYER

Lord, no matter what I’m going through, You promise to give me strength and hope. You will never fail me and I will count on You to lift me up on eagle’s wings. Amen.

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## “A New Look”

by Pam Kennedy

### **Memory Verse: 1 John 1:8-9**

*“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.  
If we confess our sins, He who is faithful and just will forgive us of our sins  
and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

I was angry. I had just paid a lot of money for a really bad haircut. I had arrived armed with photos of the look I wanted but the stylist barely glanced at them. She ran her fingers through my shoulder-length hair, pulling it this way and that. Then she took up her scissors and, before I could say, “not too short,” the deed was done. I stared at my reflection and my temperature rose. I mentally composed sarcastic remarks that would puncture her pride like a pin would a balloon. Then I remembered that I was a Bible study leader. I shouldn’t say those kinds of things. So I didn’t. Maintaining a stony silence, I marched to the receptionist and slapped down my credit card. When asked if I wanted to add a tip to the balance I replied loudly enough for the stylist to hear, “No, I certainly do NOT!” and huffed out the door.

I sat in my car, mad and unhappy. Then a Scripture verse about forgiveness tiptoed into my mind. I pushed it away. I didn’t want to forgive this woman who had made me look and feel miserable. Then the thought returned. “Don’t forgive her—ask her to forgive you.”

“What?!” I almost shouted at my reflection in the rear-view mirror. Why? I had not said what I was thinking. I had maintained my composure. I was a virtual wellspring of spiritual self-control. Then a still small voice whispered, “That’s not self-control. It’s self-righteousness.” I felt dirty, polluted by my own bitterness and anger, stung by conviction.

I did not want to go back into the salon. It would be embarrassing. But the Holy Spirit would not relent. Slowly, I trudged across the parking lot. I confessed my poor attitude to the stylist, asked her forgiveness, and pressed a tip into her hand. This time when I walked out of the salon, my step was lighter. I felt cleaner, the world looked brighter. And when I caught sight of my reflection in the car window I tossed my head and grinned. Maybe a new look was just what I needed.

I think that’s what John may be getting at in this passage. We all need a new look—at our sin, at God’s grace, and at the wonderful cleansing offered to us when we confess.

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## PRAYER

Thank you, Lord, for offering us the opportunity to start over. Give us the courage to acknowledge our sin, confess it to you, and receive the transforming cleansing only you can give. Amen.



## “Becoming a Chosen People”

by David Kusumoto

### **Memory Verses: 1 Peter 2:9-10**

*“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”*

What does it take to be this people of God’s marvelous light—to live lives that are holy and different? These verses remind us, just as Moses was told on Mount Sinai, that we were created for this kind of living. These verses give us three important reminders for the journey.

“But you are a chosen race...”

First, remember that we are chosen. God first chose to love us. He knew us and loved us from before we were born. In the same way, my wife and I love our two sons. The love of choice, and especially God’s love of choice, is one of the most powerful realities we can experience. You cannot earn His love. We can sometimes fall into the mindset of trying to please God. Today let’s be reminded that God has already chosen us for His purposes and pleasure.

“...a royal priesthood...”

Secondly, remember that we are a royal priesthood. In ancient times, priests mediated the divine. That is, if you wanted to know what God was like, you would look at the priest. You would see his character and nature, how he worshipped and served. This is our great calling today in a dark and hurting world. Do people truly get a sense of our Lord when they see our lives, how we live, work, play and even rest? Are we a kingdom of priests who reflect the love, compassion and mercy that is our Father’s?

“...a holy nation...”

Thirdly, remember that we are called to be holy. Set apart. Just as we are to keep the Sabbath day holy, our lives should be kept holy. What a great metaphor! The Sabbath is the one day of the week that should be different from the rest. Where we don’t do usual things of work and toil. We rest physically, mentally and emotionally on our Sabbath. So, too, our lives in this world should be marked with that kind of difference.

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## PRAYER

Lord, give us the space today to reflect these reminders. Help us to truly know that You have chosen us, called to be Your priests and set apart for your Holy living. Bring to the surface the ways You want us to change. Not to earn Your love, but to bear Your character and love in this world that desperately needs people of Your marvelous light.



## “Jesus Christ is Lord”

by Nan Fancher

### **Memory Verses: Philippians 2:8-11**

*“And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*

Who is Jesus to you? These verses in Philippians say it all. It is a very clear statement about the Christian faith. The God who is one God and who does not share His glory with anyone else, shared it with Jesus, His only begotten Son!

In October 2009 an armed robber was caught on camera pointing a gun at an extremely frightened woman. In sheer panic the woman alternated between praying for Jesus’ help and begging the gunman not to shoot her. As the gunman faltered, the woman also began praying for the gunman!

Suddenly the young man dropped to his knees. Through his tears he convinced the woman that she would not be harmed. Then the gunman walked away, leaving the money behind. The video of the robbery attempt was shown on the news that evening. The gunman’s mother recognized her son and convinced him to turn himself in.

When interviewed later at the police station, the gunman shared the fact that he had been raised to be a Christian, but had chosen to follow his own course rather than God’s way. He was asked what the woman said that convinced him to walk away. Was it her prayer for him? He said, “No.” He explained that he suddenly heard God speaking to him and that all he could do was fall to his knees in surrender.

These verses from Philippians remind each of us that no matter what we think of Jesus and His claim upon our lives, we can either fall to our knees and surrender to His leadership now, while we have a choice, or we can fall to our knees with regret later when there is no choice.

Since we all have a bit of a Napoleonic complex, let’s take time this week to ask God what area(s) we haven’t yet surrendered to Him. We might know without asking. We may also be in for a surprise.

## PRAYER

God, we confess we have areas that have not yet been surrendered to Your Lordship. Thank You for becoming one of us through the person of Your Son. Thank You for showing us how to live and love. Thank You for redeeming us! Help us to kneel before You and bring You glory as we boldly confess that Jesus is Lord. Amen.

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## “All I Really Need”

by Kirk Leavy

### **Memory Verses: Lamentations 3:22-23**

*“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.”*

It’s impossible for me to read this Scripture without humming the chorus of the Thomas Chisholm hymn, “Great Is Thy Faithfulness.”

“Great is Thy faithfulness, Great is Thy faithfulness, Morning by morning new mercies I see: All I have needed Thy hand hath provided. Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!”

Chisholm didn’t write “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” because of a single life-changing event. He wrote it because he had a lifetime of experiencing the faithfulness of God. He once wrote, “My income has not been large at any time due to impaired health in the earlier years, which has followed me on until now. Although I must not fail to record here the unfailing faithfulness of a covenant-keeping God and that He has given me many wonderful displays of His providing care, for which I am filled with astonishing gratefulness.” Thomas Chisholm was expressing his personal revelation of the “morning by morning” mercies of God’s faithfulness.

Unlike Thomas Chisholm, I haven’t had a lifetime of realizing God’s faithfulness. I had started attending church as an adult because of my wife. I was being a dutiful husband and she thought it would be good for me. One Sunday afternoon she signed me up for the annual men’s retreat and told me, “You should go. It will be fun. They’re having a golf tournament.”

Worried about spending the weekend with a bunch of men sharing their feelings, I went thinking I could always leave if it got weird. Things didn’t get too weird, so I stayed. On the final night, anxious to go home and sleep in my own bed, I listened to the tearful testimony of a man who had lost a friend to cancer. He seemed comforted knowing his friend was with God, and praised Him. His testimony was powerful and I realized he had faith in a God I did not know.

It was there I realized my need for God and that He could be my source of hope if I would just accept Him. I realized God had been in my life all along, patiently waiting for me. I had been ignorant of God’s goodness and love in my life and prayed for His forgiveness. I knew then that He was all I needed. Tomorrow was going to be a very different day.

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## PRAYER

Father, thank You for your enduring patience and mercies. Thank You that You are faithful even when we are not. Thank You for Your forgiveness, though we have done nothing to deserve it. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.



## “House Calls”

by Pastor Sim Fulcher

### **Memory Verse: Revelation 3:20**

*“Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you and you with me.”*

Last week Diversified Exterminators knocked at our door in Manoa. We heard them and let them in—a perfect illustration of how not to receive Jesus Christ. How so? I’ll explain.

Revelation 3:20 may be familiar: Jesus makes house calls; He lets His presence be known; letting Him in is up to us; and He wants to eat with us. From the verses just before verse 20 we learn also that Jesus is a lot like the proverbial Fuller Brush man who does house calls carrying cleaning goods for sale. However, with Jesus the goods are free although the cleaning program appears to be rather intense. But that’s another verse, another story. Our concern is verse 20. Jesus paints the following word picture.

Jesus stands at the door of our lives. He makes it known in unmistakable ways that: It is He; He wants to enter our lives; and no matter how inviting our words are to Him, He will not enter until we do the opening up—the lock and latch being on our side. A look at the verses that go before reveal that Jesus carries with Him all we need to have a fulfilled life. The key is in verse 20 where Jesus says; “I will come in to you and eat with you and you with me.” And that’s where “Diversified Exterminators” comes in.

Dining together in the ancient world was a sure sign of intimacy. When Diversified Exterminators knocked, we let them into our house, but not into our hearts. We let them into every nook and cranny—more of our house than our own loved ones have seen—but we did not sit down and eat with them and they with us. We wanted them to come and rid us of all the annoying, disgusting, yucky creatures in our house but we did not try to make them feel at home.

Could it be that we sometimes are content with a “Diversified” relationship with Jesus? We receive Jesus with our hands but not with our hearts? We ask Him to come and rid us of all the yucky uncomfortable things in our lives but we do not share our lives intimately with Him? We enthusiastically offer Him access to every part of our being, but we give Him the right to no part? If so, then we have not truly received Christ.

## PRAYER

Lord, forgive me that I am so often content with giving you access to the halls of my being without making a home in my heart for you. Come into my heart Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for you. Amen.

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## “Jesus’ Rewards Program”

by Michael Shishido

### **Memory Verses: Revelation 22:12-13**

*“See, I am coming soon; my reward is with Me, to repay according to everyone’s work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”*

I love books. So much so that I have one of those reward charge cards for a major bookstore. Every charge I make helps me to amass points that then turn into coupons I redeem at the store for books. Naturally, every penny I spent went on the charge card. I wanted to build up the rewards and get more books.

Maybe you do this with airline miles or some other redeemable item. Some put their purchases on credit cards and let the points pile up. They then redeem the points in a catalog of highly desirable merchandise and services.

Somewhere in the backrooms of corporate America, accountants are keeping track of what you spend your money on and how many reward points you compile. Believe it or not, there’s a similar situation going on in heaven. Except it’s not your purchases that are being monitored. It’s your behavior. Your deeds. Your service toward humanity. Jesus is the Master Accountant keeping tabs on everything you do.

You might be asking, “How do I collect?” Well, this heavenly reward system isn’t like your credit card program. Heavenly rewards don’t come in a monthly statement.

Jesus says in Revelation 22:12, “See, I am coming soon and My reward is with Me, to repay according to everyone’s work.”

We all collect upon Jesus’ second coming. And the payout is based on the kind of things we do here on earth, in the name of Jesus. And in that respect, it’s not what we buy and acquire for ourselves that build up heavenly points. It’s the things we do for others that count.

The expectation is that while we’re here on Earth, we are the hands and feet of Jesus. Much of his work is done by us, as we’re led by the Holy Spirit. It goes along with the passage in Matthew 6:19-20 where Jesus instructs us to store our treasures in heaven.

Our godly work today will pay off in major rewards from Jesus upon His return.

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## PRAYER

Lord I pray that my work here on Earth will honor and glorify You. Jesus, we wait expectantly for your return.



## “My Grace is Sufficient for You”

by Ann Kai Millard

### Memory Verse: 2 Corinthians 12:9

*“But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’ So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.”*

Grace is a word we read in the Bible and seldom stop to think about. In fact, most of us associate grace with sitting down to a Thanksgiving dinner or watching a ballet rather than the precious gift God desires to give us.

The Greek word is “charisma,” which means both “favor” and “gift.” When favor comes from God as a gift, it’s not a reward for good behavior, because there is nothing we have done to deserve it.

But here is Paul, abandoning his life to God’s call and working miracles of healing for scores of others. However, after pleading with God to heal him and take away his “thorn in the flesh,” what does God say to him? “My grace is sufficient for you.” Is that the answer of a loving, caring God? Most of us would be whining and complaining, or perhaps coming to the conclusion that God is not loving and caring after all.

The amazing thing is that God’s grace is sufficient for us, if we will just put it to the test.

When I went on my first missionary outreach, our leader said to us, “Remember to hold on to your Grace tickets.” What on earth was she talking about? I was a savvy person who had traveled a lot and lived for two years in a 3rd world country. What could possibly overwhelm me beyond my ability to cope? What I hadn’t factored in was traveling with 40 other people, being constrained by someone else’s decisions, and living in primitive conditions.

I hadn’t expected to sleep on the floor with just a thin piece of foam between the concrete and me; or to walk outside to the toilet, fearful of meeting a snake; or to ride in questionable vehicles driven by men who believed in karma and didn’t care if we died in the next ten minutes.

I held tight to my Grace ticket and discovered in the process that not only was God protecting me in some horrendous situations, but he was also teaching me about the ugly bits of my character that He wanted to scrape away. Under pressure, my prayer life soared as never before.

I returned from outreach two months later with a new awareness of my flaws, but also knowing that God’s grace was truly sufficient for me.

## PRAYER

Lord God, you are greater than our minds can ever imagine, yet You are aware of every detail of our lives. Thank You for Your grace, Your undeserved, unearned gift of favor that You shower on us just because You love us. Don’t ever let us forget this. Amen.

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## “Heart Check”

by Ron Mathieu

### **Memory Verse: 1 Timothy 6:10**

*“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.”*

There are more than 2,000 references to money in the Bible, but this admonition is probably the best known and most often quoted. And most of us have at least heard the clarification that the Bible never says it’s wrong for a man to have money...the problem comes when money has the man.

Have you ever noticed that young children just naturally offer some of what they have to others? It’s only when they grow older that they develop a sense that what they have is mine, all mine.

So how can we discern if our attitude about money is leaning past satisfaction and toward rooting all kinds of evil? Ask yourself:

- Do I concentrate more on making money than doing a good job?
- Do I derive my pride and security from how much money I have or make?
- Do I respect or cater to people who have a lot of money more than to those who don’t?
- Do I never have enough money? Will I ever have enough money?
- Do I flaunt how much money I have and what it provides?
- Do I resent giving my money away without expectation of anything in return?
- Do I move away from God (sin) in order to make money?

This last question holds the crux of today’s Bible verse, because we cannot serve both God and money. The love of money leads to all kinds of evil, and no sin is excluded from what people will do in order to attain it.

The flip side of the coin (pun intended) is that we can have a lot of money and be right with God. Jesus always emphasized it is the attitude of our heart that matters. These questions provide a quick heart-check. Take an honest assessment and meditate on how you stand and how you can move in a better direction... honest to God!

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## PRAYER

Lord, I commit to serve You before money and the things it buys. I recognize Your hand in whatever bounty I enjoy. I pray that I can understand Your purpose is to see if I can steward it without coveting more, and be grateful enough to give some back for Your use. Amen.



## “Spiritual Warfare: A Winning Strategy”

by Peter Millard

### **Memory Verses: Ephesians 6:10-12**

*“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”*

At 6:00 a.m. on March 14, 1998, my wife and I were at the heiau with our small prayer team. We had been preparing for this day for over three months by meeting weekly to fast and pray. The purpose of this statewide prayer initiative was to break the evil web of demonic power over the islands by cleansing the sites where human sacrifice had occurred.

This was not a task we took lightly. We were well aware of the dangers involved in spiritual warfare if one was naïve and unprepared. Satan’s power is real, and his demonic forces are strong. Their main purpose is to derail God’s work by destroying his people. We were given a simple protocol to follow, which included not only prayers but also praise songs and the celebration of communion, symbolizing the powerful cleansing blood of Jesus. We anointed the four corners of the large stone platform as well. Each prayer team across the state mirrored this protocol. Signs and wonders were manifested throughout the morning on all the islands at various sites as God moved mightily to reveal his sovereignty and power over Satan’s territory.

In the early and mid-19th century when the first missionaries arrived from New England and introduced Hawaiians to the Christian message, there was almost universal acceptance of the Gospel. Close to 98% of the population became dedicated followers of Jesus. Because there was no clear understanding of the importance of spiritual warfare, however, after two or three generations the number of believers dwindled, and Satan was able to reestablish his dominion over the spiritual climate of Hawaii.

Since 1998, the number of churches, large and small, in Hawaii has proliferated. The eviction of Satan from the ceremonial religious sites of ancient Hawaiian culture has resulted in a spiritual climate that is more receptive to the Christian message. One does not have to look farther afield than our own church, which has grown exponentially over the past decade.

Whether we have experienced the demonic or not, it is important to be knowledgeable of this spiritual dimension of life. As followers of Jesus we have the Holy Spirit to give us strength to combat the forces of evil, which want to destroy, distract and tempt us. We can stand on God’s Word knowing that we have His armor at our disposal.

## PRAYER

Almighty God, enable us to be aware of the efforts of Satan to derail us from being faithful followers on the Way. Protect us, Holy Spirit, and help us to discern the schemes of the evil one. Help us to pray powerfully for our families, our church and ourselves. Amen.

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## “God Loves A Cheerful Giver”

by Nan Fancher

### **Memory Verse: 2 Corinthians 9:7**

*“Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”*

One definition of happiness is, “a beautifully wrapped present with your name on it!”

There’s an art to gift giving, I think, especially when it involves giving a gift to a friend or family member that you love. First, it helps to keep gift giving in mind all year around – in case you spot something you know would be perfect. Coming up with a gift at the last minute sometimes leads to disaster. Then, so the gift isn’t lost, it helps to have a designated shelf or closet in which to store what you’ve found. It’s even good to tape a name on it.

Last, but not least, it’s important to spend time on the presentation. Yes, we all have too many other pressing things to do, but it’s sometimes that “first-impression-wrapping” that says, “You are important to me,” or best of all, “I love you!”

Here’s a personal tip. I like to have several, inexpensive little items that I also wrap and tuck into the box; things I sometimes find at a checkout counter, such as a special pencil, etc. Those I call surprises! Over the years, I’ve found that those little extras are often the favorite part of the present, especially for the younger set.

By now there are probably many of you thinking that the above ideas will never have any application for you. But there may be one!

In our memory verse today, Paul seems to be saying that when it comes to giving to God, even He knows the difference between a thoughtless gift, grudgingly stuffed into His hands, compared with one that has been thoughtfully planned, and lovingly presented. Best of all, when we give a gift to God, we don’t have to go out and buy wrapping paper and ribbon. We only have to put a smile in our hearts!

## PRAYER

God, You are the best giver of gifts. The gift of your Son, Jesus, is the proof! Help us to give gifts to You with the same love and forethought that we put into giving to others. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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## “Future With a Hope”

by Pastor Dan Chun

### **Memory Verse: Jeremiah 29:11**

*“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”*

What a powerful thing it is to live a life with hope. When I write my Compassion child, I always try to write that I believe in her or him. I tell them that with God they will always have hope. In Jesus, their needs will be fulfilled.

When we lose hope we can get depressed. It says in the Bible, Proverbs 13:12, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.” Makes sense. If we feel there is no hope, no light at the end of the tunnel, why wouldn’t we despair?

Sometimes, we don’t need someone to tell us we’ll never make it. We have voices in our head that say, “You’re no good. You’re not pretty. You’ll never have friends. You will never amount to anything.”

But if we let God’s voice be the main voice in our head, we can have strength for the journey. Can you hear His voice saying to you, “For surely I know the plans I have for you...plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”

God actually has planned for us a destiny that will not be harmful but for good. Can we believe in the deepest part of our heart and soul that God is so good that He is always working out a plan for us, and that we would just be open to His voice and pray and seek His face?

How would you live if you knew that God has a plan for us of a great future and hope? Live it! For He has just that for you.

But don’t keep that hope just for yourself. As you realize the power of hope, can you find someone this week to instill hope into?

I have made it through the years because when I have been in the “trough of life” someone came up to me and gave me hope through a Bible verse, an affirmation, or an exhortation that showed me that in due time, all will be well.

Be a hope-builder this week, and tell someone that God has a future and a hope for him or her.

## PRAYER

Lord, we bow down before you in obedience. May we know that as we follow You and Your principles that your destiny for us will be revealed. May we live with hope and joy! Amen.

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## “Humbled and Thankful”

by Cory Oliveros

### **Memory Verse: 1 Thessalonians 5:18**

*“In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”*

The Apostle Paul encourages the people to walk in God’s grace, freely given through Christ Jesus, and to know the heart of the Father. It is because of God’s love for us that we are able to rejoice in every circumstance—never ceasing to offer our thanksgiving and praise.

It’s so easy to praise God and offer our thanksgiving when things are great. But how about when things are not so great?

I remember a time when my wife and I had just started out as newlyweds. We lived in a humble dwelling. I worked a job that provided just enough for us to get by.

One month, we were struggling financially and weren’t sure how we would make our next rental payment or even have enough money to eat. The idea of praising God and offering thanksgiving was foreign. I remember feeling like God wasn’t there for us. The reality of it was that God was there for us and it was just that our hearts were so far away from His presence.

Well, God proved himself to be a faithful God. Without even knowing our financial situation, one of our neighbors blessed us with a grocery certificate. We were reminded to praise God in that moment. We were so humbled after that experience and are always reminded that His faithful love endures forever!

## PRAYER

Father, Your love for me is so great. I give You thanks and praise. Although life can bring many trials and hard circumstances, I choose to follow after Your heart. Your ways are higher than my own. There is never a circumstance that is too big for You. Jesus, You are the reason why I can walk in God’s grace and love. Amen.

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**“Behind the Name”**

by Rosella Shishido

**Memory Verse: Isaiah 9:6***“For a Child has been born for us, a Son given to us; authority rests upon His shoulders; and He is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*

When our son Matthew was two, I told him that his name means “gift of God.” Matthew was very eager to learn this, and so we went over it again and again till he knew it by heart.

When my husband came home that evening, I said, “Matthew, tell Dad what your name means.” Taking the liberty to use his own words, Matthew proudly announced, “Daddy, I’m a present!”

There was also a very special reason for choosing the name “Matthew.” We wanted a name that will always remind us that our precious first born is a gift from God because Matthew came at a time when we weren’t ready for him.

The world wasn’t ready for Jesus either when He was born. Even though the prophet Isaiah foretold His coming hundreds of years prior, not many noticed the night Jesus was born. There was no room for Him in the inn and so His introduction to our world happened in a lowly manger. But that did not lessen the importance of Jesus’ birth one bit. It was and still is monumental. His birth set the ball rolling for God’s loving plan of salvation for us so we can be delivered from our slavery to sin.

Jesus’ name means “God is salvation.” In Isaiah 9:6 we find other names given to Jesus meant to give us hope and a stronger faith in Him:

- **Wonderful Counselor**, the awe-inspiring One who will govern us and guide us in our decision-making.
- **Mighty God**, the all-powerful One who is able to help meet our needs and capable of providing even far beyond that.
- **Everlasting Father**, the timeless and unfailing One who doesn’t change, and is God Himself.
- **Prince of Peace**, the fair and just One who will protect us and look after our well-being.

Many more names for Jesus are listed in the Bible, but I don’t think there will ever be enough to truly describe who He is.

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**PRAYER**

Lord Jesus, I praise you for what’s behind Your mighty name. Help me to remember who You are that I may learn to trust You more and more each day.



**“Down But Never Out!”**

by Sarah Lau

**Memory Verse: 2 Corinthians 4:8-9**

*“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.”*

I am just an ordinary person with an ordinary life. But I have a story to tell and God is the Protagonist, not me.

When I first began to cling to the word of God, it was during a time when I was hard-pressed and perplexed, to say the least. I felt persecuted and knocked down, for the umpteenth time. My husband and I were in the midst of a financial disaster, our marriage was not doing so well, and I began to self-medicate any way that I could. Finding a remedy to my situation was beyond any worldly prescription that I could find. I tried everything, but it all just seemed so hopeless.

It was through the innocent words and hugs of a child that I found my hope and allowed God to take center stage. In all of my brokenness, this small, fragile child illuminated my soul with the light and love of Jesus Christ. I am not sure to this very day if she has any real idea of the magnitude her words and actions had on my life and the lives, in turn, that God has allowed me to touch with my story. I was in the dark pit of self-loathing and self-destruction before literally seeing the light and love of Christ shining straight from the heart of a child into mine. I was not alone; I was down but not out.

It is for His glory that God has given us shabby, breakable exteriors (2 Corinthians 4:7). This is so that we might not take any credit for the light that shines through us during our times of pain and suffering; that others might want to know what keeps us going when we're down. They may even begin to desire it so much that they will seek God with all of their heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Most of us are not asked to endure anything even close to what Jesus had to endure in His final time on earth. He was ridiculed, tried as a common criminal, abandoned by His followers, tortured, spat upon, and finally killed for the sake of imperfect and ordinary people like me. I remember this in my times of trial, and I thank God that I am never alone in this fight; that my God will be at my side no matter what.

**PRAYER**

Lord, thank You for the gift of Your Spirit that lives in my heart. Thank You that You have made me ordinary so that You might shine extraordinarily in and through the lives of others. Let Your light shine through my trials this day. In Christ's name, Amen.

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## “The Gift of His Presence”

by Pastor David Stoker

### **Memory Verse: Luke 2:10-12**

*“But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’”*

One of the purposes of this devotional book is for the church family to get to know the writers better. For that reason I will share with you that I was born on Christmas Eve. Over the years I have always liked the fact that I was born the day before Christmas, for the days before Christmas are a very special time. I often think of the significance of what happens before Christmas at the church, and what happened in Bethlehem many years ago.

At the church it is such a busy, yet joyful time. The day before Christmas there are choir practices, last minute adjustments to sermons, reminders to the greeters and ushers of the huge crowds that will be coming, sound checks of microphones, costume adjustments for any Christmas characters that might be in the sermon or drama, watering of the floral decorations for the sanctuary, worship bulletins to be printed, and plans for how we will get all those cars in our church parking lot. In our homes there might be last minute cleaning, last minute present buying and special cooking and baking. There is so much activity on the day before Christmas, so that we can enjoy the day of Christmas.

I think of Mary and Joseph and the preparations they made for that first Christmas. Mary accompanied Joseph to Bethlehem for the census ordered by the Roman Empire. In her preparation for Jesus’ birth, how did she endure the trip to Bethlehem? It is 70 miles as a jet flies from Nazareth to Bethlehem. She probably walked. You women who have been nine months pregnant, do you think you could have walked even five miles? And even if she rode the donkey, donkeys have hard spines and rock the rider. It had to be a rough trip for Mary. Her day before Christmas was not easy.

Then her due date had arrived. As Luke writes, “She gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger—there was no room for them in the inn.” Oh, come now Luke, don’t be so matter-of-fact. You sound just like a man. Give the girl some credit. Mary lived through quite a trauma! What kind of atmosphere is a barn for a baby and mother? The powerful odor of manure, the smell of sheep and other animals, and the aroma of hay are quite a contrast with our sterile hospital rooms! Yet, God was in the midst of it all.

May we see God’s presence not only in the grand events of our lives - like the birth of a baby or the celebration of Christmas, but also in the small, everyday events, that often lead up to the events we often remember.

Emmanuel - God with us, not just on Christmas Day, but also in the days before Christmas.  
Emmanuel - God with us, not just on the momentous days of our lives, but every day.

## PRAYER

Lord, remind us that You truly are Emmanuel—You are always with us. May it not take a special occasion or a special day for us to realize that. You desire to fellowship with us each and every day and so with that in mind, please help us to make each day of our lives count for You.

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## “True Life”

by Nicholas T. Love

### **Memory Verse: John 10:10b**

*“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”*

I recently read a story by Pastor Greg Laurie that really brought this passage to light. He wrote, “The story is told of an artist who sculpted a beautiful angel and wanted the master artist, Michelangelo, to inspect it and offer his opinion. So Michelangelo was called in. The master artist carefully looked at the sculpture from every angle.

“Finally, he said, ‘Well, it lacks only one thing.’ Then he turned around and walked out.

“The artist didn’t know what it lacked, and he was embarrassed to go and ask Michelangelo. So he sent a friend to Michelangelo’s studio to try and find out what his statue lacked.

“The great artist replied, ‘It lacks only life.’”

When one looks at the beautifully sculpted angel as the master artist Michelangelo did, one can see that it is perfect in almost every way, however the angel is missing the most important thing—“life.” This resonates with human beings as well; one could be perfect in nearly every way, but still lacking life. One could have an amazing family, money, friends, house and even an English bulldog, but this individual can still be lacking life.

In the Gospel of John, we can find Jesus saying that His life, His purpose is so that we may have life. Life is something so much more than anything this world can give us, or do for us. Jesus, not only wants us to know that He is the life giver, but He also wants us to have an abundant life. This does not mean health and wealth, but rather much more than that. This means a real growing relationship with the Lord, a relationship that is alive. This is an abundant life, a relationship with the God who created the universe, and a God who loves us unconditionally.

Michelangelo was a master artist, but the master artist could not give life to something that was so perfect. Only God can give life and only through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ can we obtain this gift, and be able to live it to our fullest. The question is then, do you believe this, or are you still trying to find life from things that cannot give Life?

TUESDAY

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WEDNESDAY

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THURSDAY

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FRIDAY

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## PRAYER

God, You are the God who wants a relationship with us, and we know through this relationship we can have an abundant life. Thank You, Lord, for coming to give us life, and allowing us to live it to the fullest. Amen.



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# BIBLE VERSES DEVOTIONAL

50 VERSES OF SCRIPTURE