

# ECH<sup>®</sup>OES

## ADULT STUDENT GUIDE

SPRING 2026



SOCIAL TEACHINGS  
OF THE CHURCH

DAVID  COOK

# ECHOES<sup>®</sup>

## ADULT STUDENT GUIDE

### SPRING 2026

*Adult Student Guide* is published quarterly by David C Cook, DavidCCook.org. © 2026 by David C Cook, 4050 Lee Vance Drive, Colorado Springs, CO 80918, U.S.A. Echoes<sup>®</sup> and David C Cook and its related logo are registered trademarks of David C Cook. All rights reserved. ISBN 978-1-589-19426-7. Large Print ISBN 978-1-589-19428-1. Printed in South Korea. All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version<sup>®</sup>, NIV<sup>®</sup> Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.<sup>®</sup> Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture quotations marked (KJV) are taken from the King James Version. Lessons and/or Readings are based on the Uniform Series International Sunday School Lessons International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching copyright © 2022 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Digital products are subject to the End User License Agreement (EULA) found at [DavidCCook.org/EULA/](http://DavidCCook.org/EULA/) and any additional terms or restrictions that may accompany the product. Digital products cannot be returned, sold, or relicensed. This product license is good for 6 months. After 6 months, you must purchase another license. All rights reserved worldwide.

**David C Cook would like to thank the following lesson contributors:**

Madison Cannon, Nate Carter, Lee D. Hoffer, Victoria McAfee, Patricia Merritt, Rebecca Moss, Tanae Murdic, Michael Rade, Dara Searcy-Gardner, Carl Simmons, Denise Snyder, Joshua Timlick, Faith Waters, Roslyn Yilpet

**Editors**

Jason Hitchcock  
Trinity Richards

**Designer**

Dale Johnson

**Production**

Sean McCoy

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Spring 2026: Social Teachings of the Church

### Unit 1: Fulfilling Our Obligations to Neighbors

Lesson 1	Mar 8	Watching Our Consumption Daniel 1:8–17; 1 Timothy 4:7–8	3
Lesson 2	Mar 15	Giving to the Community Deuteronomy 15:4–11; Matthew 25:42–45	10
Lesson 3	Mar 22	Welcoming Others in Christ Acts 10:9–15, 30–35; Galatians 3:28–29	17
Lesson 4	Mar 29	Waiting for God’s Peace Isaiah 2:2–4; Acts 17:26–28	24

### Unit 2: Fulfilling Our Obligations to Family and Community

Lesson 5	Apr 5	Resurrection: The Future Hope 1 Corinthians 15:13–20, 51–58	31
Lesson 6	Apr 12	Authority: Belonging to God Mark 12:17; Romans 13:1, 6–8; 1 Peter 2:13–17	38
Lesson 7	Apr 19	Children: Gift and Model Mark 9:36–37, 42; 10:13–16	45
Lesson 8	Apr 26	Family: Distinct and Obedient Deuteronomy 6:3–9; Matthew 19:3–9	52

### Unit 3: Fulfilling Our Obligations to God and Society

Lesson 9	May 3	Christian Expectation of Grace Jonah 3:1–5; 4:6–11	59
Lesson 10	May 10	Work as Christian Duty Genesis 2:15; Exodus 20:9; John 5:17; 9:4; Acts 20:33–35; 2 Thessalonians 3:6–12	66
Lesson 11	May 17	Christian Manner of Justice Deuteronomy 24:14–21; Ephesians 6:5–9; 1 Timothy 6:17–19	73
Lesson 12	May 24	Christian Rhythms of Life Mark 2:18–28	80
Lesson 13	May 31	Living in Christian Community Matthew 28:18–20; Hebrews 10:22–25	87

Mary Prince: Wrongfully Convicted, Exonerated, Welcomed as Part of the Carter Family	94
---	----

ISSL Bible Study Plan 2023–2026	95
---------------------------------	----

Coming Next Quarter	96
---------------------	----

# WHAT'S AHEAD

## QUARTERLY PREVIEW

Faithful Christians have always confronted social issues in the world around them, bringing Christ's witness into their individual time and place. The first unit challenges us to work together toward common ends in homes and communities, on the basis of mutual love and respect. The second unit discusses the promise of eternal life and our obligations in this life. The final unit has lessons on our duty to society while giving allegiance to God. We find opportunities to fulfill our roles, to strive toward the balance of work and rest, and to worship in Spirit and in truth.

Here are the biblical principles that we will study and apply to situations in our lives:

**Lesson 1:** We honor God with our bodies and with our thinking.

**Lesson 2:** God prompts us to use money to help others.

**Lesson 3:** Jesus means something different and new.

**Lesson 4:** God will bring peace to all nations.

**Lesson 5:** Cosmic victory arrived at Christ's resurrection.

**Lesson 6:** Real freedom is through submission to God's authority.

**Lesson 7:** Come to Christ with the wonder of a child.

**Lesson 8:** Be faithful in and through family relationships.

**Lesson 9:** Our just God shows grace and mercy.

**Lesson 10:** Be creative and productive in all you do.

**Lesson 11:** Trust in God and not the uncertainty of wealth.

**Lesson 12:** Jesus is Lord, and we need Him at the center of our lives.

**Lesson 13:** God has a mission for each of us.

# WATCHING OUR CONSUMPTION

Tiana cleared her throat and turned off the screen on her phone. She had been hollering at it for the past thirty minutes. It had become the evening ritual. As she watched each clip pulled from the news, she could feel the curiosity and shock rise within her, eventually turning to irritation and anger.

Now, her voice was a little sore. She realized that she could have easily woken her six-year-old in the next room.

Tiana tried to turn her mind to time with God. She would have read from her Bible, but her heart wasn't in it. So instead, she rested in God's presence, even though her mind was still on the news. She was still angry.

"I'm sorry, Lord," Tiana said aloud. She quieted herself again.

Slowly, Tiana began to feel the love and peace of God envelop her. She began weighing the experience, feeling as if God's Spirit was ministering to her soul. "This much negativity and conflict was not good for her. Even though following the news wasn't all bad, it was making her an angry person.

"A fast from the news? That could be good," Tiana heard herself say. It's the sort of thing her daughter would notice. Her mom would be a lot less preoccupied.

- 1 When has something *good* occupied too much of your attention?
- 2 What distinguishes healthy discipline from unhealthy obsession?
- 3 How can we use things we love to connect with the Lord?

<sup>8</sup> But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. <sup>9</sup> Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs. <sup>10</sup> And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king.

<sup>11</sup> Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, <sup>12</sup> Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat and water to drink. <sup>13</sup> Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat, of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants. <sup>14</sup> So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days.

<sup>8</sup> But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. <sup>9</sup> Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, <sup>10</sup> but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you."

<sup>11</sup> Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, <sup>12</sup> "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. <sup>13</sup> Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." <sup>14</sup> So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

## Faithful in Exile

Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, were taken to Babylon from their home country of Judah. They didn't ask for this fate. For many years, Judah was weakened and corrupted by inadequate kings. God allowed Babylon to lay siege to Jerusalem and to send many people into exile.

Daniel and his friends are young and capable, which is why they have been chosen for future service in the courts of King Nebuchadnezzar. They would learn the language and customs of Babylon.

Over time, their identities are expected to shift and to change, and they receive new Babylonian names to match.

These servants-in-training are fed well, with food and wine from the king's own table. Their position is meant to help them adapt to new lives, exiled far from their homeland and families. For three years, they would be apprenticed in this role.

But in verse 8, Daniel makes a hard decision: not to “defile himself” with all these fancy things to eat. It could mean several things. Perhaps the food did not fit the requirements of Israel's covenant agreement (see Lev. 11). Alternatively, the royal food might have been offered to idols and false gods. Or, perhaps Daniel notices that accepting rich food would signal disloyalty to his people, who were struggling and starving. Whatever the reasons, Daniel wants to remain a faithful servant of the one, true God. By taking a stand, he invites his friends to join his commitment to faithfulness.

Even as a slave in the court of a foreign king, Daniel is treated with respect by the chief official (Dan. 1:3). He lives in such a way that others notice and show “favor and compassion” (Dan. 1:9). But the king's chief official is concerned that Daniel and his companions will look thin and unhealthy if they eat only vegetables and water (v. 12).

Thus Daniel devises a test. He and his friends shall eat this restrictive diet for ten days, after which time their appearance can be compared to the rest. If these exiles of Judah remain faithful to God, they expect God to be faithful in return, meeting all of their needs.

**1 What are some reasons that Daniel might choose not to eat food from the king's table?**

**2 What are ways that we can cause outsiders to look upon us with favor, instead of suspicion?**

**3 What might have given Daniel confidence to devise a “test” of his diet?**

<sup>15</sup> And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat.

<sup>16</sup> Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse.

<sup>17</sup> As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

...

<sup>7</sup> But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. <sup>8</sup> For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

<sup>15</sup> At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.

<sup>16</sup> So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

<sup>17</sup> To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

...

<sup>7</sup> Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. <sup>8</sup> For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

## Faithful in All Circumstances

In each age, God invites His people to be faithful. When ancient Israelites were worshiping Baal, Elijah hears that seven thousand servants remain, kept safe by God (1 Kings 19:18). When fearsome armies threaten, God promises that a remnant shall endure (Isa. 10:21–21). And in Daniel's time, the exiles to Babylon step into the role. They must pay attention to what they do and say, even what they eat in a foreign land.

The four men pass their self-devised test. At the end of ten days of eating a restrictive diet in the Babylonian court, they appear healthier than all the rest (Dan. 1:15). God's faithfulness goes beyond preserving their physical health: they receive great "knowledge and understanding" (v. 17). And Daniel is singled out for his ability to interpret "visions and dreams."

Because the exiles do not depart from faithful living, God helps them succeed in other things. Like other ancient people, the

Babylonians see dreams as powerful messages from the gods. Their people seek to understand dreams through divination, but Daniel has this gift of interpretation from the one, true God. He can use his skill for the success of his new home (compare Jer. 29:7). But while living in Babylon, he and his friends shall not lose their identity as God's servants.

For the second reading, we move forward more than six centuries. The challenge of walking faithfully with God continues, even after Judah returns to the land. Jews struggle with foreign kings and rulers who disrupt worship of God or who mock those waiting for God's deliverance. But at the coming of Jesus, God's deliverance arrives. *Jesus* is the ultimate demonstration of faithfulness to God's purposes: a servant of God who sacrifices His life for the good of others.

Followers of Christ still live in a kind of exile, in a world not fully reconciled to Him. In a letter to Timothy, Paul encourages his ministry partner. He knows that living faithfully can be a challenge, when culture exercises a powerful influence. Some Christians at the time were reacting by multiplying restrictions, forbidding marriage and certain foods (1 Tim. 4:3). But Paul teaches that faithfulness in this age is not about mere physical things, like what we eat or whether we are married. He tells Timothy to "train" like an athlete might train—to train in godliness (1 Tim. 4:7–8).

What we consume with our mouths is important, since God created the physical world. But training in godliness will have lasting, eternal effects. Pursuing godliness means that we evaluate what we use to entertain ourselves, the stories we tell, and whether we are rejecting the influence of evil (see 1 Tim. 4:1, 7). By turning our minds to God and the pursuit of truth, we demonstrate "hope in the living God" (v. 10), which is the ultimate act of faithfulness.

**1 How does God use individuals who remain faithful, in the history of Israel and today?**

**2 Daniel's act of faithfulness was to restrict his diet. What kinds of faithfulness does Paul advise for believers?**

## Set Apart

Here's how old I am: when I was in college, my friends and I called each other on a flip phone if we wanted to chat! But things change quickly. Within a few years of my graduation, everyone had their faces on social media, and it became an incredible way for our group to stay connected. My social media intake grew, until I recently realized how much my news and entertainment choices were defined by what I discovered on these platforms.

Part of this is understandable, since I live a long way from my family and several lifelong friends. Remote communication is a great way to keep up to date with everyone. I like to know what's going on in the world—politically, socially, and theologically—and these up-to-the-minute notifications would love to do that for me.

It was last year during Lent that I realized something “not-all-bad” could still cause me harm. I could be envious of what others have when I begin to compare myself to their lives. I can even be overinformed—trying to know every problem in the world, every argument that people are having. The platforms love to push anything that triggers strong emotions.

Because of this, I have started fasting from social media, at least once a year. Putting it aside doesn't kill me, and it helps me act with wisdom if I choose to pick it up again.

I think about how much emphasis I place upon my fitness and physical health, and the same must be true of my spiritual life. If I want to train myself in godliness, to allow the Holy Spirit to shape me, then it can require experimentation. It could mean saying “no” to consuming things that fill me with conflict and saying “yes” to time with God. He has called us to be set apart. We can never just swallow what everyone else is doing, but we lay every decision before Him.

**1 What are examples of things that we can consume that are not beneficial for us?**

**2 What can cloud our judgment about what is good?**

**3 How might you choose to live in the world, without compromising your values?**

## Evaluating Our Consumption

In an imperfect world, there are any number of ways that our habits of consumption might not be surrendered to God. By paying attention to our habits, we can honor Him in our daily living.

For the next three days, you are invited to keep track of your intake in one area of consumption (food and drink, entertainment, social media, or something else). Hold your record before God with a prayer:

*Father, would any changes be honoring in Your sight?*

Be prepared to respond to what God chooses to show you.

### Key Text

Exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

—1 Timothy 4:7b–8 KJV

Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

—1 Timothy 4:7b–8 NIV

### Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

#### Week of March 9 through March 14

**Mon.** Psalm 12—God Will Defend the Needy.

**Tue.** Luke 12:13–21, 33–34—Do Not Be Afraid to Give.

**Wed.** Leviticus 19:11–18—Treat the Neighbor with Justice.

**Thu.** James 2:8–13—The Royal Law of Love.

**Fri.** Luke 10:25–37—Everyone is Our Neighbor.

**Sat.** Deuteronomy 15:4–11—Compassion for Those in Need.

**Next Week:** Deuteronomy 15:4–11; Matthew 25:42–45

*We will discuss living “openhanded” to the needs of others. What are some blessings from God that make you grateful this week?*

# GIVING TO THE COMMUNITY

“What is this refuge ministry I was hearing about?” Nikita asked Diamond, who was driving her home from Sunday service. That morning, the pastor singled out several people who were making an impact in the community. There was also a special opportunity to give.

“Our church happens to have a lot of licensed counselors. Years ago, we had the idea to offer mental health resources for anyone who can’t afford it.”

“Say more,” said Nikita, adjusting in her seat.

“It was about five years ago, and the Lord laid on our pastor the profound need around here,” said Diamond. “He talked to a woman in our church who was a licensed therapist, eager to help. With the church’s blessing, she developed a three-month training course. Several people went through it, and four of them went on to receive degrees and certificates as counselors themselves! But the point all along was to be a resource for the community.”

“We have a small office off of Martin Luther King Jr. Drive,” Diamond continued. “Counselors from the church volunteer their time, on a rotation. It helps to make an appointment. But if there are walk-ins, that’s okay too. As you can imagine, we get all kinds of people. Around here, many are veterans.”

Diamond glanced at her friend and added, “Just culturally, there is resistance to seeking mental health services. We wanted to make it simple. I actually volunteer with the administrative work.”

“I noticed something different about this church right away,” said Nikita.

**1** What does it look like to be “openhanded” in your current context?

**2** Is there anything that makes it harder for you to give or to serve others?

<sup>4</sup> Save when there shall be no poor among you; for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it: <sup>5</sup> Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day. <sup>6</sup> For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee.

<sup>7</sup> If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: <sup>8</sup> But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. <sup>9</sup> Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee. <sup>10</sup> Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. <sup>11</sup> For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.

<sup>4</sup> However, there need be no poor people among you, for in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you, <sup>5</sup> if only you fully obey the LORD your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today. <sup>6</sup> For the LORD your God will bless you as he has promised, and you will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. You will rule over many nations but none will rule over you.

<sup>7</sup> If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. <sup>8</sup> Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need. <sup>9</sup> Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: “The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near,” so that you do not show ill will toward the needy among your fellow Israelites and give them nothing. They may then appeal to the LORD against you, and you will be found guilty of sin. <sup>10</sup> Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. <sup>11</sup> There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.

## **A Generous and Just Nation**

God brings the Israelites out of Egypt, calling them His people. He gives instructions to set them apart from every other nation. Some laws are about how to worship the Creator, but others regulate the treatment of other humans.

The Israelites are to demonstrate justice in all financial dealings. Under Pharaoh, they were exploited for financial gain. This is not to be the pattern for God's people. They should be generous with one another, "openhanded" instead of "tightfisted" or "hardhearted" (Deut. 15:7–8). God says, "There need be no poor among you" (Deut. 15:4).

One way to follow those words is to lend money freely, instead of seeking the highest return. Every seven years, God commands a year of "release" (see Deut. 15:1–3). Debts would be canceled and lands returned to their ancestral owners on a regular basis. Thus Israel would not be a nation of *haves* and *have-nots*, a place where poverty becomes inescapable.

But will this make wealthy people unwilling to loan money at all, if debts will eventually be forgiven? God calls the lender to put the thought aside, or else the poor will "appeal to the LORD against you" (v. 9). Such generosity would bankrupt other nations, but God guarantees blessing, if Israel shall obey (v. 10).

It is helpful to reverse the logic of this. Since God *can* bless His people with abundant resources, they can be generous in turn, sharing resources and forgiving loans. The result is that there shall be no destitute people in the entire nation! Someone in a tough situation shall have a community ready and eager to help. This is the just community that God wants for Israel: a community where generosity is normalized.

**1 Where do you see poverty becoming like a trap today?**

**2 If God commanded generosity for the Israelites, what will God ask for believers today?**

**3 Are business relationships a place to show generosity? Why or why not?**

<sup>42</sup> For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

<sup>44</sup> Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

<sup>45</sup> Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

<sup>42</sup> “For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

<sup>44</sup> “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

<sup>45</sup> “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’”

## WWYDFJ

The ancient Israelites fall short of the just requirements of God. Yet Israel is reconstituted around God’s own Son. Jesus sends twelve disciples to proclaim the kingdom of God to the “lost sheep of Israel,” offering blessing on those who repent and respond to the good news (Matt. 10:6). Their welcome of Christ’s messengers is as important as the welcome of Christ Himself (Matt. 10:40–42).

He expands this message in Matthew 25 with an image of final judgment. Jews knew that God would judge all people, separating those deserving of reward and punishment. And when Jesus says that “all the nations” shall be presented to the Son of Man, listeners would anticipate God’s favor for Jews and harsh judgment for Gentiles—certainly those who, like Rome, had oppressed others for selfish gain (v. 32). *At last*, they might think, *God’s justice unveiled*.

Jesus makes an unexpected pronouncement. It’s not ethnicity that the judge sees, nor membership in Israel. The judge—Jesus Himself, called “Son of Man”—decides based upon the treatment of others. He doesn’t provide a list of works to do, but He points to the defining trait of His true disciples: serving others in need (v. 31).

Treatment of brothers and sisters determines how Jesus feels treated by us. If we do not care for the needs of others, we reject Jesus, since He identifies with those in need. He says, “I was a stranger . . . I needed clothes . . . I was sick and in prison” (Matt. 25:43). When followers of Jesus see others in need, they should imagine how Jesus would want to be treated. Instead of, *What would Jesus do?* the question is, *What would you do for Jesus?*

In Jesus’ telling, the test catches people off guard (Matt. 25:44). They call Jesus “Lord,” but they did not realize their treatment of “the least” was relevant (vv. 44–45). God has a special heart for the most vulnerable. Anyone who receives unmerited favor must open their eyes to the needs all around—to Jesus in disguise.

**1 What kind of people does Jesus mean by, “the least of these” (v. 45)?**

**2 Why does care for these people matter to Jesus?**

**3 Why would Jesus preview future judgment?**



Two of Jesus’ apostles to be imprisoned were Peter and Paul, and each is rumored to have been held in the *tullianum*—a dark hole accessed only through a small opening. Prisoners survived only if visitors would bring food.

Chris 73

## **What Is Money For?**

Think about some things people have used as currency in history: shells, beads, salt, gold, whale teeth, and now even cryptocurrency. At its core, money is a tool to convey value. Unless you are a collector, you value money because of what it promises: freedom, time, esteem, relaxation, and more.

We are always tempted to project value onto the possessors of money, but Jesus reforms our understanding of value. Being rich is not a mark of our worth, just as being poor is not a knock against us. When Jesus tells of a man who enjoys the status of riches, the man loses it all because he is not “rich toward God” (Luke 12:16–21). If money is to have value to Jesus’ followers, it is for what they use it to accomplish, who they are able to help, and what glory they bring to God.

We shouldn’t forget that money is a tool. We might have a goal to earn more, but the next goal should be to surrender it for God to use. After all, earthly riches are temporary; they pass from our control when we die. Heavenly treasures last forever: faith, relationships, the love we show (Matt. 6:19–21). More money doesn’t signal spiritual success. But what we do with it is surely relevant.

Like the community of ancient Israel, the Body of Christ is called to embrace justice and decency for anyone in need. The witness of the community in Acts 2:45 was that “anyone” had enough. As individuals, we can’t make ourselves responsible for every need we encounter. But as a community that follows a just God, generosity should be a distinctive act of worship.

**1 Imagine you were given a 150% raise at work. What would you do?**

**2 Where have you seen someone valued according to how much money they have?**

**3 Has your church community been known for generosity? How?**

## Seeing Need as God Does

Make a list of needs in your local community (your church's prayer list; requests from your small group; or other needs of your neighborhood, workplace, or school). Commit to pray for these needs today and in the week ahead. Pray for your openhandedness toward God's invitations to you. Perhaps it will be a phone call for encouragement, an offering, or some other way that God will use you to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

*Jesus, I open my hands and commit myself to serving these needs:*

### Key Text

For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.

—Deuteronomy 15:11 KJV

There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.

—Deuteronomy 15:11 NIV

### Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

#### Week of March 16 through March 21

- Mon.** 1 Samuel 18:1–5—Souls Bound Together.
- Tue.** 1 John 4:7–16—Abide in God's Love.
- Wed.** 1 John 4:17–21—Loving God and Each Other.
- Thu.** Isaiah 56:3–8—All Peoples Will Worship God.
- Fri.** Psalm 133–134—Living Together in Unity.
- Sat.** Galatians 3:25–29—Children of God Through Faith.

**Next Week:** Acts 10:9–15, 30–35; Galatians 3:28–29

*We are equal in God's sight. What examples of welcome and equality can you spot this week, perhaps in news stories or in conversations with friends?*

# WELCOMING OTHERS IN CHRIST

“Lamonte, man, you’re turning us down to run with that guy?” said his coworker.

“His name is Habib,” replied Lamonte, “He and I already planned to have lunch together.”

Once the two were in Lamonte’s truck, Habib said, “I would have understood if you wanted to go to lunch with your friends.”

“Oh, no. We said we were going out,” said Lamonte. “*You* are a friend and, most importantly, my Christian brother.”

It was a year earlier when Lamonte learned that Habib was a believer. Habib was from Iran, and his family was in the small minority of those who followed Christ. He and his wife had first come to the US to attend college and later received green cards.

Lamonte was fascinated to hear Habib talk about following the way of Jesus in a majority-Muslim nation. Just listening to Habib felt like rediscovering a courageous faith.

“I have to thank you, Habib,” said Lamonte. “Your heart and graciousness challenges me.”

“Brothers,” Habib said, offering a fist to Lamonte.

“Brothers,” Lamonte agreed, taking one hand off the steering wheel for a fist bump.

**1 When have you discovered something surprising about someone you know?**

**2 What does it say about God that He calls people of all types?**

<sup>9</sup> On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: <sup>10</sup> And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, <sup>11</sup> And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending upon him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: <sup>12</sup> Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. <sup>13</sup> And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.

<sup>14</sup> But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.

<sup>15</sup> And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

<sup>9</sup> About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. <sup>10</sup> He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. <sup>11</sup> He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. <sup>12</sup> It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. <sup>13</sup> Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”

<sup>14</sup> “Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.”

<sup>15</sup> The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”

## A Shocking Command

At the time of Peter’s vision, Cornelius’s trusted messengers were on their way to find him. God had been moved by Cornelius’s generosity to the poor and devout prayers, and God sent him a message about Christ (Acts 10:4–6). Cornelius was to meet Peter, but God needed to prepare Peter for what was about to happen.

Peter is a man of action, with a strong sense of justice. It is Peter who leaps to Jesus’ defense and cuts off the ear of the servant of the high priest when Jesus is being arrested (John 18:10–11). One can easily imagine that the Holy Spirit (ever a gentle and good teacher) knows how difficult it will be for Peter to accept that the gospel is even for his Roman oppressors. To prepare Peter, God sends a vision.

It was noon, and Peter—an itinerant preacher traveling on foot—would be hungry. Two meals a day were normal in first-century Jewish culture, and the noon meal was often the first substantial food

of the day. As a meal is being prepared, Peter goes up on the roof to pray and falls into a trance (v. 10).

He sees heaven opened, with a sheet descending, one filled with animals, reptiles, and birds—several creatures Jews were forbidden to consume according to the Sinai covenant (see Lev. 11:13–30). Then a voice comes from heaven, inviting Peter to eat from these animals (Acts 10:13).

Peter reacts with repulsion. As a devout Jew, he rejects food that is unclean. Eating it would make *him* ceremonially unclean—excluded from sacred spaces, needing to wash himself and his clothes, remaining unclean for a period of time (see Lev. 17:15–16).

But the voice rebukes Peter. The declaration raises the question, *What is it that God has made clean?* Peter—who has studied for years at the feet of a Lord who often used metaphors to describe the kingdom of God—realizes that this vision isn’t only about dietary laws. God is talking about people!

**1 Is there a group of people that your church community might struggle to include?**

**2 Why do you think God uses this roundabout way to tell Peter His plan? Wouldn't it have just been easier to come right out and say it?**

**3 What else do you notice about the phrase, “that God has made clean” (v. 15)?**



Peter would be familiar with displays of power from high-ranking Roman military commanders. This cavalry helmet of polished bronze dates to the third century and could have been worn in parades.

Carole Raddato

<sup>30</sup> And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, <sup>31</sup> And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. <sup>32</sup> Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. <sup>33</sup> Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God. <sup>34</sup> Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: <sup>35</sup> But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

...

<sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

<sup>30</sup> Cornelius answered: "Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me <sup>31</sup> and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. <sup>32</sup> Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.' <sup>33</sup> So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."

<sup>34</sup> Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism <sup>35</sup> but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.

...

<sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

## Equality in Jesus

Cornelius's story must have floored Peter. First of all, Peter learns that this was happening at the same time as his vision, which shows God's hand. Secondly, "a man in shining clothes" (v. 30) is a description of angels (compare Luke 24:4; Acts 1:10). It would be shocking that a Gentile would be singled out for a visit from angels who declare, "God has heard your prayer" (v. 31). Cornelius's role as a Roman

centurion could make him responsible for quelling rebellions, upholding Rome's violent control of Judea. Peter must have noticed the irony: a man from the very system that killed Jesus now stood before him saying, "We are all here . . . to listen" (Acts 10:33).

Meanwhile, the Jewish leaders felt threatened and were responding harshly to those who called Jesus the Messiah. Peter had already been arrested and flogged (Acts 4–5), and Stephen had been martyred (Acts 6–7). Some of the Jewish authorities were persecuting the messengers of the new covenant, while here a Roman commander was ready to hear.

Peter accepts this as God's doing. He declares, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right" (Acts 10:34–35). Paul echoes and expands this truth in Galatians, insisting that not only are Gentiles *equal* before God, but in God's sight, there is "neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female" (Gal. 3:28). Ethnicity, class, and gender are not barriers to becoming God's child.

For Peter and Paul, the Spirit is the great equalizer. If the Spirit had come upon Cornelius and his household, then they were already holy—living temples of God. And if every believer is a temple, then no ethnicity, social rank, or gender can give advantage in the kingdom of Jesus.

**1 Why do you think God mentions Cornelius's gifts to the poor?**

**2 What does Cornelius's declaration, "we are all here in the presence of God to listen," signal about him as a person (Acts 10:35)?**

## **The Spirit Leads**

Peter's encounter with Cornelius marks a powerful turning point in history. It is not only a story of one group of Gentiles receiving the gospel. It is a revelation of the heart of God, a revelation that God's kingdom includes people from all backgrounds and contexts. For Peter—a devout Jew shaped by cultural memory and prejudice—a vision on the rooftop prepared him to change his assumptions about who is acceptable to God. God was expanding the new covenant to people without regard to whether they were Jews or Gentiles.

God had actually been preparing this moment for generations. From the promise to Abraham, to the words of the prophets, to Jesus' ministry among outsiders, we see evidence of God's intention all along. The same Spirit who came in power upon the Jewish believers at Pentecost was now filling Gentiles—even a Roman centurion, whose rank is a symbol of imperial power.

The fact that Peter could recognize Cornelius as a full member of God's family speaks to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit—not only in Cornelius's life, but also in Peter's. Peter began to see others the way God does, as beloved by God and invited into the family without reservation. This truth is echoed in Paul's bold declaration in Galatians 3:28. The limitless reach of the gospel levels human division. In Christ, our ethnicity, gender, or status does not determine power or significance any more than the size of our bank account or social media following.

The Spirit is still preparing us, forming one new people—beloved and equal in God's eyes. We are all commanded to follow in the footsteps of our Lord, declaring the gospel to our enemies and setting aside worldly evaluations of one another.

**1 When has God slowly prepared you for something new?**

**2 What are some scriptural stories showing God's inclusion?**

**3 Do you think that equality before God obliterates all distinctions? Why or why not?**

## The Gospel for All People

The good news of Jesus is available to everyone: those who look and act like us and those who are vastly different. This week, you are invited to a silent reflection before God, and it only requires that you put yourself in a position to see others. While you are in a public area (a park, shopping mall, airport, etc.), allow extra time for people watching. As people pass—various ages, nationalities, and backgrounds—pray these words. Feel free to record any observations as you pray.

*The gospel is for you.*

### Key Text

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.  
—Galatians 3:28 KJV

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.  
—Galatians 3:28 NIV

### Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

#### Week of March 23 through March 28

**Mon.** John 18:28–38—A Kingdom Not of This World.

**Tue.** Numbers 6:22–26—The Lord's Peace.

**Wed.** Psalm 46—God Is Exalted Among the Nations.

**Thu.** Amos 9:7–12—God Guides the Destiny of the Nations.

**Fri.** Revelation 21:21–27—Glory and Honor of the Nations.

**Sat.** Isaiah 2:1–5—The Nations Shall Gather to God.

**Next Week:** Isaiah 2:2–4; Acts 17:26–28

*We will talk about Paul's creative strategy of preaching peace. What unique ways to share Jesus have you been privileged to see?*

# WAITING FOR GOD'S PEACE

Darryl sat quietly at the table, listening with the other school board members. The meeting had started out as routine, became tense, and now was mildly hostile.

It was supposed to be a meeting to discuss the challenge of funding cuts. But in a district as diverse as his, people were always comparing the funding of activities that appealed to one group or another.

“At least our kids aren’t the ones making our school have so many translators. That’s where all the money is going!” said one parent in a huff, with a glance at the Latino families seated in the room.

“Let me assure you, we are talking about different budgets. And let’s try to keep the tone respectful, so that we can continue to hear from everyone,” Darryl said, knowing his words would not be enough.

Being a “minority” in a majority-minority area wasn’t easy, as he certainly knew. Even a local race for school board seemed to have ugly undertones. He often found himself caught in the middle of parents who would do anything to advocate for *their* students. He had sway with the community and a reputation for honesty, but there was little he could do to fix the underlying suspicion and racial tensions that had been around for years.

*God, Darryl silently prayed to himself, we need your peace to reach down to our world.*

**1 What captivates our attention about the idea of peace, making us long for more and more?**

**2 Is there anything unrealistic about seeking peace in the world where we live? Why or why not?**

<sup>2</sup> And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

<sup>3</sup> And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

<sup>4</sup> And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

<sup>2</sup> In the last days

the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established  
as the highest of the mountains;  
it will be exalted above the hills,  
and all nations will stream to it.

<sup>3</sup> Many peoples will come and say,

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
to the temple of the God of Jacob.  
He will teach us his ways,  
so that we may walk in his paths.”  
The law will go out from Zion,  
the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

<sup>4</sup> He will judge between the nations  
and will settle disputes for many peoples.

They will beat their swords into plowshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks.  
Nation will not take up sword against nation,  
nor will they train for war anymore.

## The Mountain of God

Isaiah—God's prophet to the nation of Judah—envisions restoration, not only for his people, but for all nations. It exceeds what God's people might naturally expect. Isaiah writes, “The mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains” (Isa. 2:2), meaning it will be recognized for its enduring importance. Rival hills—representing rival kingdoms and their gods—shrink away to nothing. All will see the true God for who He is: the center of Israel's worship, which will become the center of the whole world. The nations will come to worship Yahweh, “streaming” to the place of His presence, like a flowing river.

Isaiah reveals that many will long to be part of God’s people, going up to His mountain and to “the temple of the God of Jacob” (Isa. 2:3). Jacob had inherited the promises God made to Abraham and Isaac that God would make Abraham’s family into a great nation and bless all people through his family (see Gen. 12:1–3). From Jacob came the twelve tribes of Israel, who inherited God’s covenant after being rescued from slavery in Egypt. Isaiah 2 reveals that the nations will come to embrace the God of Jacob and be included in the Lord’s tribe. People from all nations will become a part of God’s people. They will come with the purpose of learning God’s ways and walking in His paths. This will result in the law—the word of the Lord—going forth from exalted Zion, borne by the nations to spread throughout the earth.

In verse 4, Isaiah speaks of God as the righteous judge who will bring peace to the nations as they submit to Him. He will “settle disputes for many peoples” (Isa. 2:4). As a result, the nations will put away war and violence against one another, turning their pointless weapons into useful tools for farming.

Here, “plowshares” refers to the metal tip of a plow used to break up dirt or dig a furrow for planting (v. 4). The shards of broken swords would serve this purpose well. Similarly, the head of a spear can be fashioned into a curved knife for pruning. The transformation of weapons into tools means the ground will no longer be covered with the blood of violence, but cultivated for the good of earth’s inhabitants. The nations will no longer need to “train for war” (Isa. 2:4), since God brings a lasting, abiding peace.

**1 What does it mean for God’s mountain to be established as the highest?**

**2 How are these verses related to God’s promise to bless the nations through Abraham?**

**3 What will happen when people from all nations turn to the true God?**

<sup>26</sup> And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; <sup>27</sup> That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: <sup>28</sup> For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

<sup>26</sup> From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. <sup>27</sup> God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. <sup>28</sup> ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’

## God’s Desire for the Nations

Acts 17:26–28 finds Paul in the midst of a speech in the city of Athens—where residents fashion themselves to be educated and intellectual, open to all of the latest ideas. What a place to give a sermon! The Areopagus is where all of the best teachers and philosophers would come to speak, and Paul had inflamed opposition by debating Greek philosophers, who accused him of “advocating foreign gods” (Acts 17:18), a serious offence. Still, the Athenians seem curious.

As a springboard for his words, Paul mentions an altar he has seen, “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD” (Acts 17:23). Seizing upon this show of religious devotion, Paul says that he is not so much advocating foreign gods as he is proclaiming the one, true God who the Athenians are ignorant of—the Creator who is Lord of heaven and earth (Acts 17:24). In verse 26, he proclaims that all nations are a result of God’s creative work and intention. Moreover, God is over them and their leaders as their rightful Lord. Throughout history, nations rise, expand, and fall—all according to the will of God.

In verse 27, Paul conveys God’s intention by appointing times and boundaries for the nations. Paul says, “God did this so that they would seek Him” (Acts 17:27). Yet the seeking is not without difficulty. According to Paul, those seeking can “perhaps reach out for him and find him” (Acts 17:27). This language conveys the idea of

groping in the dark. Paul reassures the gathered crowd, “[God] is not far from any one of us” (Acts 17:27). It explains Paul’s mission, for it is tragic when God is not known by men and women who might be seekers. The city of Athens was full of idols and competing religious ideas (see Acts 17:16, 18). The true God remained unknown to them, obscured by pagan beliefs. Paul desperately wants the people of Athens to know the truth of the gospel, which is not only for Jews, but for all nations.

As he continues, Paul appeals to literary sources that would be familiar to his Greek audience. He shows that he has studied their poets and religious ideas, not only his Jewish Scriptures. Since the words of famous philosophers and poets carry weight for his audience, he quotes what serves his argument. This does not amount to wholesale approval for everything these writers say, but Paul knows that all truth is God’s truth. In other words, if something is wise and true, it belongs to God—no matter the source.

In verse 28, Paul says about God, “For in him we live and move and have our being.” He is actually quoting a line from the Cretan philosopher, Epimenides. Paul uses it to argue that all people owe their existence to the Creator—the “unknown God” who is in entirely knowable. Paul adds the poetic phrase, “We are his offspring” (Acts 17:28), originally attributed to the Stoic philosopher Aratus. Aratus wrote the phrase in a poem to Zeus—the right idea about the wrong deity! Paul makes the phrase point back to the true Creator, for all nations are from His creative design.

**1 What is God’s desire for people of all nations?**

**2 Given that God is always near, what keeps some people from finding Him?**

**3 What can we learn from Paul’s strategy of quoting sources familiar to the Athenians?**

## Longing for Peace

“Hey dad, do you know about the attacks of September 11?” My son was sitting in the kitchen reading a children’s history book. *Oh boy, I thought, I wonder what a kid’s book says on that topic.*

I stopped washing the dishes. “Yeah,” I said, “I remember when it happened. It was a pretty big deal.”

As we talked, I was trying to figure out how much he already knew. Kids grow and pick up all kinds of knowledge about how dark the world can be; but my heart as a dad thinks, *Not yet. He doesn’t need to know just yet.*

“Wasn’t there something about Afghanistan?” he asked, and I explained that many countries went to war after the attacks.

“Are there wars going on today?” he asked. “What are they about?”

I remember I said something clumsy about “land disputes,” but then kind of trailed off. What I really wanted to say was, *War is terrible, violence begets violence, but someday God will make it all right. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

But before I could open my mouth, my son had already moved on. He was roaming the house in search of his next game or adventure. I turned back to the dishes. I felt myself longing for peace, the way people sometimes do at Christmas or when they hear a song imagining a better world.

Can such longings be realized? Do prayers for peace get stuck in the ceiling, or do they reach the ears of someone who can actually bring peace to the nations? Scripture teaches that Jesus’ death and resurrection changes everything. The kingdom of God has good news for the nations! If we could only glimpse the end of history, we would see an abiding peace.

**1 How do you answer a question like, “What causes war and conflict in the world today?”**

**2 What is the last event that made you long for peace?**

**3 How can followers of Jesus share a message of peace for the nations?**

## Peace Forevermore

In a world where conflict and violence are ever-present, the anticipation of a new heaven and new earth, marked by eternal peace, is an incredible promise.

**As you read or watch the news this week, pay special attention to the reports about wars and conflicts. Pause your news feed to pray for those stories. Then thank God that, when Jesus returns, those conflicts will be resolved and peace will reign, forever.**

### Key Text

And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. —Isaiah 2:3 KJV

Many peoples will come and say,  
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
to the temple of the God of Jacob.  
He will teach us his ways,  
so that we may walk in his paths.”  
The law will go out from Zion,  
the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. —Isaiah 2:3 NIV

## Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

### Week of March 30 through April 4

- Mon.** John 14:1–4—Many Dwellings in the Father’s House.
- Tue.** 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18—Encouraging Words of Hope.
- Wed.** Job 19:23–27—I Know That My Redeemer Lives.
- Thu.** Isaiah 26:12–19—Awake and Sing for Joy.
- Fri.** Psalm 118:15–24—Give Thanks to the Lord.
- Sat.** 1 Corinthians 15:13–20—Christ Is Risen from the Dead.

**Next Week:** 1 Corinthians 15:13–20, 51–58

*We will talk about bodily resurrection. What are some euphemisms we use for death and dying? Why do we default to speaking in those terms?*

# RESURRECTION: THE FUTURE HOPE

“I can’t believe they are taking so long to get here!” said Valencia to her mother. The family was gathering for their Easter dinner at her aunt’s home, and all the cousins had shown up before her brother and their father.

“Nathan and your dad left church at the same time we did,” said her mother. “Maybe they had to stop somewhere, but if they don’t hurry up and get here, I’ll have to set aside a plate of the baked ribs and scalloped potatoes.” She knew that the rest of the family was caught up in conversation, but they were ready to begin serving the annual family feast. Everyone loved to share their favorite dish, but of course, the important part was for the whole family to be together.

Just then, Nathan squeezed through the back screen door, and Valencia’s mother turned to see Jon coming through the front.

“That was quite an entrance. Took you long enough!” her mother teased, her voice at a level no one else would hear.

“So many places were closed. We had to drive around a bit,” Jon whispered.

“You just *had* to find a smoke shop on Easter? Don’t you see anything strange about that?”

**1 How does the hope of resurrection shape the way we should look at our bodies?**

**2 When do you find yourself looking down upon the body, or treating your body poorly?**

<sup>13</sup> But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen:

<sup>14</sup> And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. <sup>15</sup> Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: <sup>17</sup> And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. <sup>19</sup> If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

<sup>20</sup> But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

<sup>13</sup> If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

<sup>14</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

<sup>15</sup> More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. <sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. <sup>19</sup> If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

<sup>20</sup> But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

## Taste What Is Coming

Perhaps there is no text more appropriate for the joy of Easter Sunday than 1 Corinthians 15. Paul is writing to Gentile Christians in the wealthy city of Corinth, home to the temple of Aphrodite and many pagan religious practices. Paul begins by saying that he communicated the accurate and complete gospel story of Jesus' death and resurrection. This was confirmed by Christ's appearance to hundreds of witnesses, most still living (1 Cor. 15:3–8). Paul knows that there are some people who dispute whether resurrection is real, so he explains the greater significance.

People in Paul's day know how bodies work: a cold corpse doesn't start breathing again! Even leaving aside the obvious physical problem, there are people in Corinth who think that physical bodies *don't matter anyway*. But Paul claims moral significance for Christ's resurrection (1 Cor. 6:12–20). He says, "God raised the Lord from the dead,

and he will raise us also” (1 Cor. 6:14). In 1 Corinthians 15:13–20, Paul invites readers to a little thought experiment (notice “if” repeated in vv. 13–17, 19).

What if hope of resurrection is a fantasy (v. 13)? It cuts to the core of Christian faith, for this would mean that Jesus never rose from the dead—never defeated the grave (v. 13, 16). It would mean that those hundreds of witnesses were deluded (or lying), and Paul’s missionary work is pointless. But the problem gets even worse. Death is the punishment for sin; as Paul says in another place, “Your body is subject to death because of sin” (Rom. 8:10). Without the defeat of death and hope of resurrection, it means that we have not received forgiveness from sins either (1 Cor. 15:17). Were that true, those already dead are gone forever, and Christians who follow Jesus deserve only pity (vv. 18–19). Without hope of resurrection, they have surrendered their lives to a lost cause; all that awaits them is the common despair of all people who are lost in sin, unable to restore a relationship with the Creator.

In other words, resurrection is pretty important! And the bodily resurrection of Jesus *is true* (v. 20). It is a fact. And the logic of the thought experiment works in reverse. His resurrection proves the power of God to raise us and to forgive our sins. What happened to Jesus is not a one-off but the pattern of what we shall experience too. Like the “firstfruits” of a harvest, one with a rich bumper crop about to ripen, Christ’s resurrection is only the beginning!

**1 What difference does it make whether we hope for bodily resurrection or not?**

**2 Why does hope in resurrection relate at all to the forgiveness of sins?**

**3 What makes Jesus like the “firstfruits” of a harvest?**

<sup>51</sup> Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, <sup>52</sup> In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. <sup>53</sup> For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup> So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

<sup>55</sup> O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

<sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>58</sup> Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

<sup>51</sup> Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—  
<sup>52</sup> in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. <sup>53</sup> For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. <sup>54</sup> When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

<sup>55</sup> “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”

<sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>58</sup> Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

## God’s Victory, Revealed

Like many writers, Paul uses “sleep” as a metaphor for death and dying (v. 51). This doesn’t have to mean that death is a passive experience, but the metaphor is apt for Paul because sleep is *temporary*. Thanks to Jesus, death is temporary too.

Now that we know that the dead will rise, we might wonder: *What will it be like for people who are still living when Christ returns?* Paul describes a coming change for them (v. 51). Even though their bodies won’t have expired, they will stop being subject to decay.

The experience will come in an instant, in roughly the time it takes to shift one's gaze (v. 52). And what is “perishable” (NIV) or “corruptible” (KJV)—which means *human bodies as they are now*—will then “clothe itself” with something immortal and permanent (v. 53). Paul doesn't say, *The soul is eternal, and only it will last*. Instead, he describes what we can only call a new kind of resurrection body, or a new way of being embodied altogether, without the harmful effects of sin. Instead of allowing death to continue *swallowing* people (perhaps Paul is imagining the grave like a mouth), it is death itself that gets “swallowed up,” for Jesus has won the struggle (v. 54).

Everyone knows that mocking isn't kind, but Paul engages in what could be called “holy taunting” (v. 55). Paul adapts the language of Hosea 13:14, and the target of his taunt is death personified. Throughout all of human history, death has been the malignant enemy, robbing God's creation of glory. But in the struggle with the Son of God, death lost and had nothing to show. Paul rejoices over the defeat of death and victory over sin, for we get to experience and enjoy the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 57).

The application for Paul is, “Stand firm” (v. 58). With the victory already won, the price already paid, our invitation is to give ourselves over to any “labor” that God requires. We can spend our lives for God, because there is more where that came from.

**1 What makes you eager to be “clothed” with immortality?**

**2 What makes death the most powerful enemy of all time?**

**3 How are you enjoying the victory that Jesus won for you?**

## **Glory from the Last Adam**

Easter is the center of the Christian calendar. Don't let stores and businesses fool you into thinking otherwise! (No surprise, but they would prefer your attention revolve around the season of gift-giving.)

Easter Sunday is the realization of thousands of years of God's promises. Just think of the way that *forgiving sins* gave offense to Jesus' contemporaries. They couldn't yet imagine a person with the authority to cover sin. Thus Jesus seems to have enjoyed flummoxing the same authorities by reversing sin's effects too—healing and raising people from the dead. How is that for a display of God's power?

Jesus' resurrection is a sign of the times, God's way of embarrassing and dethroning the forces of evil. Yet unless we witness Christ's return, we must all face the cold breath of life's end. Fear and apprehension are only natural.

Those in Christ are not without hope! God has flipped the curse of death. If sin and decay come from Adam, then resurrection and glory can be inherited from Jesus (see 1 Cor. 15:49). We don't have to wallow in fear, worrying that our mortal lives are all we have. Those in Christ look forward to a glorious future with God—without pain, arthritis, or allergies. You probably have your own short list of everything going wrong with your physical body. But in the resurrection, everything that tends to go wrong will tend to do the opposite. It's not a fantasy or a cheap parlor trick; it is simply the power of the Creator, our Lord, renewing all things.

**1 What is on your short list of things you long to see renewed in your body or in the body of a loved one?**

**2 Which would you prefer: living to see Jesus return or living a full life in hope of resurrection?**

**3 What promise of Jesus gives you strength?**

## A New Day Is Coming!

This week, use a quiet time to allow yourself to consider some of the discouraging aspects of mortality (the aches and pains of aging, sickness or disease, the loss of loved ones). Then write a prayer of gratitude, giving thanks to God that we can be raised from the dead, no longer to experience the pains of mortality.

*Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, I welcome the day that my body will be clothed in glory and immortality. Give me courage to face . . .*

### Key Text

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. —1 Corinthians 15:20 KJV

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. —1 Corinthians 15:20 NIV

### Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

#### Week of April 6 through April 11

- Mon.** Proverbs 11:3–6, 8–11, 14—Wise and Righteous Counsel.
- Tue.** Acts 5:26–32—Our Ultimate Allegiance Is to God.
- Wed.** Hebrews 13:16–21—Godly Leaders Will Give an Account.
- Thu.** 2 Samuel 23:1–7—Just Rulers Fear God.
- Fri.** Deuteronomy 17:14–20—The Ways of a Godly King.
- Sat.** Mark 12:13–17—The Things That Belong to God.

**Next Week:** Mark 12:17; Romans 13:1, 6–8; 1 Peter 2:13–17

*We will talk about the role of earthly leaders. Challenge yourself to list one admirable quality in a governmental leader this week, especially someone you don't support.*

# AUTHORITY: BELONGING TO GOD

The weekly meetings at their small business were usually thirty minutes, often covering the same topics. Brenda considered the meetings pretty dry. But today was different: her manager had been asked to discuss office etiquette.

“Our company does not permit fresh flowers and strong perfumes.” Clara looked directly at Brenda. “Like many of you, I love the fresh flowers from my garden. But we don’t permit them in the building, because some workers have allergies. The same goes for wearing strong perfumes and colognes. Something *we* love can cause issues for others.”

Brenda left the meeting feeling hurt that she could no longer bring her tulips to work. She felt singled out too. Whenever tulips were in season, she made sure that her cubicle had a vase of fresh purple ones. They were planted by her son, who died in an accident a few years earlier. She made her way to Clara’s office, hoping to make one final appeal to keep her flowers.

“Brenda,” Clara placed a hand on her shoulder. “I didn’t even know the significance of those flowers, but I have other employees who are allergic. I hope you understand.”

Brenda did, but she still felt hurt. That evening, she took her tulips home.

**1 What is an example of a rule or principle that you find difficult to follow?**

**2 Who are some of the authority figures in your life?**

**3 Which is harder, following Christian or non-Christian leaders? Or is there no difference?**

<sup>17</sup> And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him.

...

<sup>1</sup> Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

<sup>6</sup> For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

<sup>7</sup> Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

<sup>8</sup> Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

<sup>17</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."

And they were amazed at him.

...

<sup>1</sup> Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

<sup>6</sup> This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. <sup>7</sup> Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

<sup>8</sup> Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.

## God Before Government

Mark 12:17 is the climax of a "conflict" story. These describe encounters between Jesus and the religious leaders, who pose questions designed to stump and discredit Him in the eyes of the people. In Mark 12:13, the Pharisees and the Herodians (supporters of Herod and his family) approach Jesus to flatter Him (v. 14). After trying to butter Him up, they ask their question: "Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?" (v. 14).

This is a highly charged question in first-century Judea. The "imperial tax" was paid only by subjects of the Roman empire. Paying represented submission to the emperor. If Jesus advocates paying, it would make Him look sympathetic to oppressive authorities. The Pharisees hope to cast doubt on Jesus' status as a potential king and

deliverer of Israel. But if He objects to the tax, the Herodians will label Him a rebel who advocates disloyalty to the empire.

Jesus recognizes the trap and asks them for a coin (v. 15). Roman coins had the relief of an important political figure, along with an inscription. Coins at the time would read “Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus.” The Pharisees and Herodians acknowledge that the coin has Caesar’s image and name on it, to which Jesus responds, “Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” (v. 17).

The response may seem like mere deflection. But the answer reflects a deep insight about how believers should relate to their governments. Roman propaganda claimed that the emperor descended from the gods, that submission was obedience to the gods. But Jesus implies a hierarchy. There are things that His followers owe to earthly rulers, but their ultimate allegiance is to the God of Israel. Where duties to God conflict with the emperor’s will, one must follow God.

Jesus’ teaching provides a context for Romans 13:1–8. Paul encourages believers to submit to authorities; they have been “established by God” (v. 1). This does not endorse every politician’s actions, but it acknowledges that God is really in charge. God instituted civil authorities, which is why they are “God’s servants” (v. 6)—whether they realize it or not. Paul follows Jesus’ lead, challenging Roman propaganda. Paul says that they are merely servants of the God of Israel, working at His pleasure and for His good purpose. Believers are, therefore, free to pay taxes without being disloyal to God (v. 6).

In verses 7–8, Paul restates and expands upon Jesus’ principle. God established duties between human beings, whether paying taxes or showing honor (v. 7). The believer must respect and fulfill these duties. Paul adds that only one “debt” is never set aside: the debt of love to one another (v. 8).

**1 Why is a question about paying taxes a trap for Jesus?**

**2 How does Jesus’ response stun His opponents?**

**3 Do government authorities have absolute power? Why or why not?**

<sup>13</sup> Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; <sup>14</sup> Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. <sup>15</sup> For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: <sup>16</sup> As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. <sup>17</sup> Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

<sup>13</sup> Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, <sup>14</sup> or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. <sup>15</sup> For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. <sup>16</sup> Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. <sup>17</sup> Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

## Exiles in the World

Peter addresses his letter to “God’s elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces” (1:1). The word translated “exile” refers to someone traveling in a foreign land (Heb. 11:13; 1 Peter 2:11). But Peter is using this word as a metaphor for his readers’ spiritual position: followers of Christ in the world. This world and its political systems are not their true home.

Peter prepares his audience to live as “foreigners” in the world. On the one hand, they must protect their spiritual selves by resisting sexual temptations that “wage war against” their souls (1 Peter 2:11). On the other hand, they must walk in holiness for the benefit of others. In verse 12, Peter urges them to “live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us” (v. 12). This echoes Jesus’ command to “let your light shine before others” (Matt. 5:16), casting the pursuit of holiness as a missionary project. Though others may slander, obedience to God will lead them to recognize God’s reign over all the earth.

It is in this context that Peter turns to the subject of how believers should relate to earthly rulers. In verse 13, Peter exhorts his

audience, “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority.” Authorities include “the emperor” and also “governors, who . . . punish those who do wrong and . . . commend those who do right” (v. 14).

Paul emphasized that God established authorities to enact justice (Rom. 13:3–4). Yet both apostles know that Roman authorities frequently fail at the task. Paul was unlawfully imprisoned at their hands (Acts 16:38), and the Roman emperor Nero is thought to have executed both Paul and Peter for their devotion to Christ. Peter agrees with the general principle that one should obey the governing authorities because God wants them to bring justice. It allows that disobedience may be necessary when the wishes of civil authorities conflict with God’s.

Peter offers an additional reason for obedience: God wants them to “silence the ignorant talk of foolish people” by “doing good” (v. 15). The “ignorant talk” includes false accusations against Christ’s followers. The “good” that Peter expects may be mere obedience to the law, or it could also mean public acts of charity. It suggests that generosity and commitment to public good will show others that prejudices against Christ’s followers are unfounded.

Peter states the underlying principle that should govern these actions (vv. 16–17). Believers should live as people whom Christ has set free, using freedom to serve God rather than sinful desires (compare Gal. 5:13). They owe “respect” to everyone and “love” to fellow believers. They owe honor to the emperor, but reverence to God (v. 17).

**1 Why does Peter address his audience as exiles and foreigners?**

**2 Why does Peter encourage living holy lives?**

**3 What reason does Peter give for obeying the authorities?**

## **Earthly Authority Is from God**

We tend to balk at the word *authority*. In a world that prizes individualism and autonomy, it feels better to defend *freedom*. We have freedom to choose our path, our friends, the person we want to marry—almost anything.

Yet within the freedoms that we enjoy, there are limits, right? If we waltz into work on Monday and decide to scream at our boss, there would probably be dramatic consequences. If we allow ourselves to stretch the truth when we do our taxes, exaggerating deductions or fudging the math, we face the prospect of a painful audit. If we choose the wrong company of friends—people who only encourage our worst habits—we might become a gossiping, cruder version of ourself.

I think of the challenging words of Jesus in Matthew 16:24–27. He encourages us to find abundant life, *not* by clinging to our will and our desires, but through surrender: laying down our lives to find what it means to live. The way of the cross requires surrender.

There is for each of us a chain of duty: first to God and second to earthly authorities. While this probably is less common than in Paul and Peter's day, an earthly authority who asks us to go against God's will does not need to be obeyed. But for civil disobedience to be a credible witness, we must follow the other instructions in the same context: submit to earthly authorities, as a habit. It means that we follow the laws of civil government, we respect and honor the role of leaders, and we must seek to use our freedom for good. If we walk this path, we elevate the name of Christ.

**1 What laws do you wish would change?**

**2 What are some good examples of civil disobedience (when just following the law would have been unjust)?**

**3 How do you show your primary allegiance to God?**

## Practice for Tax Day

As citizens of the kingdom and exiles in this world, we are taught to respect the laws of civil government. It just so happens that the deadline to file taxes is this week in the US. Whether you have already filed or not, you probably have never thought of this as an invitation to prayer and self-examination! What would it be like to say the words below?

*Father, I hold before You a record of my taxes, calculated accurately and paid in full. Somehow it reminds me that my first allegiance is to You and the glory of Your name.*

### Key Text

And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him. —Mark 12:17 KJV

Then Jesus said to them, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. And they were amazed at him."

—Mark 12:17 NIV

### Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

#### Week of April 13 through April 18

- Mon.** Psalm 127—A Heritage from the Lord.
- Tue.** Proverbs 2:1–6—My Child, Be Eager to Learn.
- Wed.** Matthew 18:7–14—Do Not Despise the Little Ones.
- Thu.** Colossians 3:20–25—Obedience That Is Acceptable Before God.
- Fri.** Matthew 21:8–9, 15–17—Praise from Infants.
- Sat.** Proverbs 20:7–12—Good Deeds of Children.

**Next Week:** Mark 9:36–37, 42; 10:13–16

*We will discuss the meaning of childlike faith. Who are the children for whom you need to pray this week?*

# CHILDREN: GIFT AND MODEL

The Ellis family could hardly put words to how thankful they felt to own a home. It took years of saving. Louis had worked a second job, and his wife, Bernadette, took extra shifts at the hospital.

But their excitement was nothing compared to their two children, ages twelve and nine. When the family got the keys, they prayed together—before the moving truck even arrived. Then the two children started planning where their beds would go in their new rooms. Maybe they would even get to paint their rooms a new color!

Fast forward six months, and disaster struck. Louis, a gym teacher, fell off a ladder while working an odd job during the summer. Bernadette held his hand while the doctor explained why this kind of bad break would probably need surgery. She tried to put on a brave face for the kids, but later on the phone with a friend, she found herself sobbing about all the uncertainties they faced. Would Louis be able to work? Would their insurance cover the full cost? Would she be able to get more shifts right away?

The next morning, there was twelve-year-old Courtney knocking at the door, wanting to give her mom the biggest hug. “Mom, I overheard when you were talking about Dad, the hospital, and everything. Do you remember when you told us that God is with us, no matter the problem?”

“You know,” her mother said while holding back tears, “you are growing up so fast. When did you get so smart?”

**1 What is an example of something you learned from a child?**

**2 What is your image of childlike faith?**

**3 What simple lesson do you need to learn again and again?**

<sup>36</sup> And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, <sup>37</sup> Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.

<sup>42</sup> And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.

<sup>36</sup> He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, <sup>37</sup> “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”

<sup>42</sup> “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea.”

## Welcoming the Children

The disciples argue among themselves as they travel to Capernaum. Once they arrive, Jesus asks, “What were you arguing about on the road?” (Mark 9:33). They are quiet, probably because they are ashamed. They had been debating who would be greatest in Jesus’ kingdom once He took over—perhaps imagining an imminent physical and political kingdom to replace Roman rule.

So Jesus does something to teach them what true greatness looks like: “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all” (v. 35).

He does something strange. He takes a child—a person of the lowest social status in first-century Judean society—and puts the child “among them” (v. 36). Jesus treats the child as one made in God’s image, every bit as worthy of God’s love and respect as the adult disciples.

Here they are, trying to vie for position and leadership. But their teacher puts a child before them. If only they could have some of the best qualities of children: wonder, dependence, enthusiasm, guilelessness. If only they weren’t so concerned about whether a task was beneath them. No task was too lowly for Jesus—emphasized when He washes their feet (John 13:1–17; compare Mark 10:42–45).

While Jesus embraces the child, He says to His disciples, anyone who welcomes and serves a little one in Jesus' name welcomes Jesus—and also the Father (Mark 9:37). Those who care for others in Jesus's name, especially those who cannot care for themselves, are caring for Jesus Himself, and would be rewarded accordingly (Mark 9:41; compare Matt. 25:31–46). Jesus desires generosity toward young and old, regardless of social standing.

Everyone who believes in Jesus is of great value; so much so that anyone who “causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble” will face enormous consequences (v. 42). Just as every good deed is remembered and rewarded, every act with evil intent shall be remembered and repaid. In fact, Jesus declares, it would be better if those who cause one of God's “little ones” to stumble were to lose their lives. You can see how greatly Jesus wants to protect the tiny faith of a child!

**1 Why is a child such an important example to the disciples?**

**2 What does it mean to “welcome” a child (v. 37)?**

**3 Why does Jesus warn about terrible consequences for anyone who harms children?**



The design of millstones has been consistent for agrarian societies across cultures. These two stones are too heavy for all but the strongest individuals to lift.

© Ahmet Kus/Getty Images

<sup>13</sup> And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. <sup>14</sup> But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. <sup>15</sup> Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. <sup>16</sup> And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.

<sup>13</sup> People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. <sup>14</sup> When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. <sup>15</sup> Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” <sup>16</sup> And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

## Blessing the Children

Jesus and His disciples go from Capernaum to Judea and across the Jordan (Mark 10:1). After debating with the Pharisees as to what constitutes grounds for divorce, Jesus goes into a house, where He continues to teach. There in the cramped quarters of an ancient house, people bring their children to Jesus “for him to place his hands on them” (v. 13). It could be that Jesus is in the habit of offering this kind of blessing, as a rabbi.

But the disciples rebuke the parents for approaching Jesus with their children. Can’t they see that Jesus is in the middle of important theological matters while he debates the Pharisees? The disciples are probably trying to protect their weary master. After all, neither they nor Jesus would have had much time or space for themselves as they traveled.

They are projecting their own exhaustion and frustration onto Jesus. And perhaps Jesus’ warnings about His impending death are starting to sink in, making the disciples sense that something important and dangerous is about to happen as they get nearer to Jerusalem. Jesus has an urgent mission that can’t be interrupted! But, of course, Mark is showing that the disciples had completely missed the significance of Jesus’ earlier teaching to them.

Jesus is thus “indignant” at the disciples’ actions (v. 14). Soon after this moment, He will again foretell His death (see vv. 32–34). Time is of the essence. But the disciples need to get it, to understand what *being a disciple* actually requires, while Jesus is there to teach them. He tells the disciples to let the children come, “for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (v. 14). Jesus wants no one to be barred from coming to Him, regardless of their status. Every person has value, created in God’s image. The children reflect that truth without question—and it is the disciples who are missing it.

Jesus then states His point in a plain manner. Children are not only an example of innocence, but they illustrate something central about faith. People who come to Jesus thinking they have all the right answers and thoughts are not really submitting to Jesus as a teacher. On the other hand, children are persistently listening and learning—using their eyes and ears to put lessons into practice.

Anyone who refuses to receive the kingdom of God as a child will never be ready to enter it (v. 15). The adults who follow Jesus should be more like children, receiving Jesus and His kingdom with a sense of wonder and enthusiasm. Like children, the disciples need to be fully present before God and to trust His rule in their lives, without precondition. As Jesus declared in Capernaum, those who wish to be great in God’s kingdom will humble themselves to become a “servant of all” (Mark 9:35). That kind of obedience requires a childlike spirit.

Jesus rebukes the disciples, but He blesses the children. With open hands, Jesus shows the meaning of *welcome*. On His mission to Jerusalem, on His way to die, Jesus has all the time in the world to spend with them.

**1 Why do you think that people wanted Jesus’ blessing for their children?**

**2 What is Jesus’ definition of His greatest disciple?**

**3 Where do we fall short of giving time to children?**

## Becoming “Like a Little Child”

Jesus gives us an challenging assignment: we must receive the kingdom like a little child, or we will not receive it at all. We are left with questions—not unlike the questions of Nicodemus in John 3 who wondered about being “born again.” *What does it mean to receive the kingdom like a little child? What if we are fully grown and don’t remember what it is like to be a child?*

Put simply, a child trusts. A child embraces. A child looks at the world as if it were enchanted. A child helps others and asks for help. That’s how we should be with our heavenly Father, who gives “good gifts” when we ask (Matt. 7:11).

As adults, many of us struggle with trust, wonder, or receiving help. Many of us choose to work things out on our own, out of pride, fear, or both. But we can unlearn the coping mechanisms we’ve developed as adults in order to learn to trust God again. We can let go of our control. Parents and caregivers appreciate when a child asks for help. We need to trust God with the things that we can’t handle.

Of course, there is a difference between childlike faith and merely childish ways. Other parts of Scripture urge adults to welcome the maturity and wisdom that comes with age and experience (1 Cor. 3:1–2; 13:11; Heb. 5:12–14). But we never cease to be God’s children (1 John 3:1). As we walk in the guidance and confidence from the Spirit, we learn the real meaning of trust.

**1 What does it mean to receive God’s kingdom like a child?**

**2 What qualities should we *not* adopt, to receive God’s kingdom like a child?**

**3 Where do you struggle most with having a childlike faith?**

## Childlike Wonder

The older we get, the harder it can be to experience awe over something new. Jesus invites us to receive His kingdom with the wide-eyed wonder of a child. This week, your invitation is to take a trip down memory lane to recall a cherished moment when you (or, perhaps, another child) experienced something new, exciting, or overwhelming. It wouldn't hurt to break out the photo books to remember the occasion.

**How might your experience show the way that Jesus wants us to welcome His kingdom? With a spiritual friend or in a journal entry, you could begin with these words:**

*There is something different about the way a child looks at things . . .*

### Key Text

Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.

—Mark 10:15 KJV

Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.

—Mark 10:15 NIV

## Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

### Week of April 20 through April 25

**Mon.** Proverbs 24:1–6—By Wisdom a House Is Built.

**Tue.** Luke 2:40–52—Growing in Divine and Human Favor.

**Wed.** Ephesians 5:21–33—Submit to One Another.

**Thu.** Joshua 24:15–21—Choose Whom You Will Serve.

**Fri.** Joshua 24:22–28—We Will Serve the Lord.

**Sat.** Matthew 19:3–9—An Inseparable Union.

**Next Week:** Deuteronomy 6:3–9; Matthew 19:3–9

*We will talk about raising children and honoring family relationships.*

*Take a moment to pray for a child who is not related to you or in your family, but dear to you.*

# FAMILY: DISTINCT AND OBEDIENT

Crystal was scrolling through photos of her family's most recent gathering on Easter. She smiled at the photo of her 88-year-old Grandma Ruth sitting with all the grandchildren and eating their candy. *Grandma Ruth loves sweets*, she thought to herself with a smile. In another photo, it seemed that Grandma was whispering something to the kids. All of the grandchildren's eyes were wide open. Crystal wondered what Grandma Ruth could've said to capture their attention in that moment. She always had the most interesting stories to share about the family.

Crystal glanced up from her phone at her twin boys, who were watching a video, and she recognized a scene from the Gospel of Matthew. *Now that is new!* Her sons barely attended church, and she had a hard time getting them to Sunday school.

"What's that?" She asked. The boys paused the screen.

One offered, "Grandma Ruth says our family's faith has kept us strong. She told us about this new video series all about Jesus. I guess we wanted to know more about God." The other sibling offered silent agreement.

Crystal could hardly believe that's all it took. Just goes to show, Grandma Ruth can persuade them of anything. Without saying another word to spoil the moment, she took a seat next to her boys.

**1 Why are family relationships so meaningful in our lives?**

**2 What are your roles in a family, and how does your commitment impact others?**

**3 Who would you say has shown a Christlike example? It can be a family member or someone unrelated to you.**

<sup>3</sup> Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey.

<sup>4</sup> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: <sup>5</sup> And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. <sup>6</sup> And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: <sup>7</sup> And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. <sup>8</sup> And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. <sup>9</sup> And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

<sup>3</sup> Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

<sup>4</sup> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. <sup>5</sup> Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. <sup>6</sup> These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. <sup>7</sup> Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. <sup>8</sup> Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. <sup>9</sup> Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

## Love God

God did something dramatic, miraculous, and unparalleled when He rescued His people from a life of slavery in Egypt. But for a generation, the tribes of Israel wandered in the wilderness, often grumbling that God's provision was not enough, that God's promises were not sufficient. The generation that came out of Egypt passed away, as a result of this hardheartedness.

But after forty years, Moses finally brought the people to the edge of the promised land. Moses himself would soon die on the border. So there, east of the Jordan River, a young community assembles to listen to his parting words—the last sermon of a wise and aged preacher. Moses will look back upon the covenant with God, sharing the most essential things for them to remember. He wants his people to walk faithfully with their Creator to receive the blessings that God has for them, not the shame that comes from abandoning these ways.

At the center of the relationship between Israel and her God are the requirements of covenant, the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1–17). The first of these Moses interprets for his listeners: “The LORD is one” (Deut. 6:4; compare Ex. 20:2–3). They must understand and operate as if God alone is worthy of worship. It is the central instruction of the Law, what Jesus would later call the first and greatest commandment: love God with undivided attention, with clarity of purpose, and with intensity of effort (Deut. 6:5; compare Matt. 22:37).

The command to love God interprets every relationship, every situation, and every task that God’s people shall do. Moses makes a short list of times and places when instruction from God should be on the peoples’ lips. If you have the attention of children, Moses says, use the opportunity! Tell what God has done and what it means to serve Him. Make it ordinary conversation for travel times, meal times, and when you rise (v. 7). In other words, always.

Moses says to put reminders of the commands of God in all the places you pass, as a constant prompt (v. 9). Even more personally, Moses says to place reminders on hands and heads. Whenever people look at one another, they shall remember that *loving God* is the central imperative for all of life together.

**1 Why does Moses preach before Israel enters the promised land?**

**2 What makes loving God the first and greatest commandment?**

**3 What might be some modern equivalents of reminders on gates and doorframes?**



After Moses’ parting words, the Israelites cross the Jordan River to enter the land of promise. They ford during peak flood season, experiencing for themselves God’s miraculous parting of the waters to leave a path of dry ground (Josh. 3:9–17).

Bill Rice

<sup>3</sup> The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?

<sup>4</sup> And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, <sup>5</sup> And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? <sup>6</sup> Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

<sup>7</sup> They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorce-ment, and to put her away?

<sup>8</sup> He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. <sup>9</sup> And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

<sup>3</sup> Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”

<sup>4</sup> “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ <sup>5</sup> and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?’ <sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

<sup>7</sup> “Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?”

<sup>8</sup> Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. <sup>9</sup> I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

## Love One Another

If the command to love God is central—the first and greatest commandment—then family relationships are an ideal context to practice this imperative. For the people we encounter on a daily basis, we should be visible reminders of what it means to worship God.

But during the era of Jesus’ ministry, experts in the Law of Moses disagreed about the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1–4. In the same sermon where Moses had taught the love of God, Moses contemplates circumstances when a husband discovers “something

indecent” about his wife and seeks a divorce (v. 1). For some Jewish teachers, this provided a universal excuse for a husband to turn his wife out “for any and every reason” (Matt. 19:3).

The Pharisees test Jesus with this thorny topic, hoping to catch Him in an inconsistency that they might use against Him. But Jesus, the Word of God made flesh (John 1:14), responds to a question about marriage by pointing back to the creation of men and women. Since God created two genders, “male and female,” Jesus says this should tell us everything we need to know about *how many* marriage partners to seek (Matt. 19:4). Serial divorce and remarriage—exchanging one partner for another on a whim—is inconsistent with the design of God. Jesus says, “What God has joined together, let no one separate” (v. 6). He reconciles this prerogative with the Law of Moses by explaining that Moses’ permitting of divorce was an accommodation, not a sweeping loophole for husbands (or wives) to depart from the central task of *loving God* through their relationships.

The firm stance that Jesus takes against divorce is a compassionate call to be merciful and forgiving of one another, to seek reconciliation. Jesus teaches that “Love your neighbor as yourself” is like the command to love God, together summarizing all of the Law and Prophets (Matt. 22:39–40). The relationships between husbands and wives are not an exception to the general pattern. Family life becomes an ideal place to face our own inadequacies and need for God. When we put God at the center of all that we do, shared life with others is where we must practice what we preach, making faithfulness to God a habit and visible sign to others.

**1 In the time of Jesus, what made some people think that divorce for any reason was permissible?**

**2 Why does Jesus point back to the creation of male and female?**

**3 Is it easier or harder for family members to demonstrate sacrificial love for one another? Why?**

## **It Begins at Home**

My daughter often gets asked, “What was it like, being a pastor’s kid?” I’m sure the curiosity comes from stereotypes of “very religious” families. I happen to think my husband and I were just doing our job, like any set of parents are called to do.

First, as her parents, we modeled what it means to love God first and have a personal relationship with God. Our children watched us as we prioritized time with God, reading and praying. They knew we had a nonnegotiable commitment with the heavenly Father.

We embraced the concept of “writing Scripture on the doorpost” through regular family time, reading God’s Word and challenging one another to memorize it too. We impressed God’s Word on our children’s hearts in random moments of the day. For instance, the way to school was for prayer, thanking God daily for delivering us to our destination safely and with everything that we needed.

Our home wasn’t perfect. As parents, we could have done a better job of settling disagreements in front of the children, instead of in private. Learning to resolve conflicts is part of being a family. But I’m proud that we modeled giving. Despite our limited finances, our family prayed for those in need and gave generously toward their needs, as God provided. Our children learned to share the same spirit of generosity and to trust that God would meet all their needs. For a time, we expanded our family by allowing another couple to stay with us. As we told the kids, “It isn’t all about us!”

After forty years of a covenant relationship with God, we still have opportunities for growth as a family. But we continue to draw strength from one another. God put us together for a reason, and we are so thankful.

**1 What are some habits you would hope to see in a family of believers?**

**2 Why is it necessary to have a covenant relationship with God before making one with others?**

**3 If you have a covenant relationship with God, how does family make it easier, or harder?**

## Family Faith Conversations

In the midst of everyday life, God often creates moments for parents (or spiritual parents) to impart truths to their children. These moments can have profound impact on the formation of young believers.

**Recall a time that a parent, grandparent, or other mentor shared a particularly meaningful truth about God. What were the circumstances? How did it impact your Christian walk? Briefly summarize the encounter or write a short prayer of thanks to God for the way it impacted you.**

### Key Text

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. —Deuteronomy 6:6–7 KJV

These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. —Deuteronomy 6:6–7 NIV

### Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

#### Week of April 27 through May 2

- Mon.** Jeremiah 29:3–7—Seek the Welfare of the City.
- Tue.** 1 Peter 2:4–12—God’s Own People.
- Wed.** 1 Timothy 2:1–8—Pray for Those in Authority.
- Thu.** Psalm 33:10–22—God Is Sovereign over the Nations.
- Fri.** Philippians 3:17–21—Our Citizenship Is in Heaven.
- Sat.** Jonah 3:1–5—A Season of National Repentance.

**Next Week:** Jonah 3:1–5; 4:6–11

*We will talk about our hesitations to share the gospel. Is there a missionary or a ministry leader who would appreciate an unsolicited note of encouragement?*

# CHRISTIAN EXPECTATION OF GRACE

Alicia folded her arms. The pastor was talking about Sister Shantel and Elder Davis. He was gushing over the two, but especially Shantel, like the woman could do no wrong. She got her GED in prison and was about to graduate with a bachelor's in social work. She wanted to help young people and to keep them from making bad choices.

Elder Davis, whom Alicia once liked, started dating Shantel more than a year ago. And now, they were engaged. Really? Shantel was a convicted felon! Why was she the one to get married first?

Alicia was even suspicious of this “jailhouse conversion.” Sure, Shantel had been at the church for more than six years. She was active in the prison ministry. She had the kind of personality that drew a lot of attention and made everyone want to talk with her.

Meanwhile, Alicia was still single, but at least she hadn't been in trouble with the law. *Lord, it just doesn't seem fair*, she thought. She rubbed her temples and could feel a headache coming. Alicia knew her jealousy was not founded in her Christian principles, but it got to her anyways. Maybe it really is as a friend had told her, “The Lord shows grace and mercy to whom He will.”

**1 Why is it sometimes so hard to show grace to those whom we consider to be unworthy of such a courtesy?**

**2 Why do people sometimes feel entitled to withhold mercy from others?**

**3 How does our God prove to be just and forgiving?**

<sup>1</sup> And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying, <sup>2</sup> Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

<sup>3</sup> So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey. <sup>4</sup> And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. <sup>5</sup> So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

<sup>1</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: <sup>2</sup> “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”

<sup>3</sup> Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. <sup>4</sup> Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” <sup>5</sup> The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

## God Sends Jonah (Again); Nineveh Repents

Even though Jonah ran away from God's command—God sent the great fish to swallow him and bring him back—Jonah has a second opportunity to heed the call. It could be that Jonah is still sitting on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, freshly out of the great fish (*gross*). Or maybe he first returned to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice, as he promised from the belly of the creature (Jonah 2:9). The text doesn't say. Whatever the case, God comes to Jonah and repeats the command to preach in Nineveh. In essence, God is giving Jonah a “do-over.” His patience and mercy are on display for Jonah, who had disregarded the message the first time. God has not given up on Jonah, and God has not given up on the residents of Nineveh, despite their sin and heinous treatment of subjected people.

When God commands, “Go to the great city of Nineveh,” He does not mention the city's wickedness again (Jonah 3:2; compare 1:2). That was the part that Jonah could wholeheartedly agree upon! God simply instructs Jonah to “go” and to “proclaim” whatever message that God will supply, at the appropriate time. Sufficiently humbled and compliant after three days inside the fish, Jonah gets up and

travels to Nineveh. To be clear though, this journey would take weeks on foot, depending on where he begins. Jonah is now willing to heed God's direction.

Nineveh was not yet the capital of an Assyrian Empire, but it is called simply “a very large city” (Jonah 3:3). It is so large that its metropolitan area takes “three days” for Jonah to traverse. After arriving, Jonah journeys to the heart of the city, proclaiming the message that God has given him: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown” (v. 4). In a modern context, this sounds strange. We are not in the habit of closely listening to the words of traveling prophets, those proclaiming a message of judgment on the street corner.

Assyria and Israel were military enemies. The residents and leaders of Nineveh face the curious sight of a lone, courageous prophet in their midst—one whose reputation for accuracy might have preceded him (see 2 Kings 14:25). And they listen to the message.

Before Jonah makes it through the entire city, his message has its intended effect. As a result of Jonah's faithful, but reluctant, preaching, “the Ninevites believed God,” signaling their profound repentance with fasting and other signs of mourning, “from the greatest to the least” (Jonah 3:5). From the king on down, the people repent and ask God's mercy (see vv. 6–9). When God sees their repentance, He responds in the way that God *always* responds to a repentant heart: He shows mercy (v. 10).

**1 Where do you see multiple ways that God is showing grace in this text and context?**

**2 Why would Jonah have been reluctant to go to Nineveh?**

**3 How can we know when repentance is genuine?**

<sup>6</sup> And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. <sup>7</sup> But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. <sup>8</sup> And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.

<sup>9</sup> And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.

<sup>10</sup> Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: <sup>11</sup> And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

<sup>6</sup> Then the LORD God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. <sup>7</sup> But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. <sup>8</sup> When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."

<sup>9</sup> But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" "It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."

<sup>10</sup> But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. <sup>11</sup> And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?"

## Jonah Complains; God Explains

Although Jonah had been successful in his mission, he is far from happy about it. In fact, he is *angry*. He goes on to complain that he knew all along that God would be compassionate, and this was exactly why he had tried fleeing in the first place. Jonah knows God to be "gracious and compassionate . . . slow to anger and abounding in love" (Jonah 4:2; compare Ex. 34:6). Jonah's level of frustration is so great that he voices a desire to die (v. 3). Instead of just heading back

home, Jonah makes a shelter for himself “waited to see what would happen in the city” (v. 5). Perhaps Nineveh would relapse, and God would bring destruction after all. Jonah could only hope.

If you are familiar with the story of Jonah, this reading picks up where many retellings leave off. God isn’t done with Jonah, and the Lord arranges an object lesson. He provides “a leafy plant” as shade to minimize discomfort (v. 6). It is a world without sunscreen, after all. And Jonah is “very happy” (v. 6). But the comfort is short-lived.

Next, God destroys the plant by sending a worm to ruin the shade (v. 7). As the plant withers, God sends ‘a scorching east wind’ to take its place, and the sun beats down on Jonah to the point that “he [grows] faint” (v. 8). With Jonah’s small comfort gone, he pleads again to die.

God shows up to question Jonah and to explain this curious object lesson. Jonah is angry about the plant; he liked it and did not want to see it wither. But God is really asking, *What is the appropriate level of concern for others?* Jonah found himself worked up and remorseful about a plant, but he first encountered it a day earlier! It was God who supplied the growth and created it in the first place. The point really isn’t about a plant, obviously, just like Jonah’s misplaced anger wasn’t just about the loss of shade. God reminds him that “more than a hundred and twenty thousand people . . . and also many animals” reside in Nineveh (v. 11)

Jonah’s response is not recorded. This is the very end of the book. But the message is about God’s mercy and concern for all people. God created them, cares for them, and offers grace and mercy in abundance.

**1 If you were to add a speaking line at the end, what do you think Jonah would say?**

**2 When have you noticed one person transferring strong emotions to another?**

**3 What do you make of the implication that God cares about the wellbeing of animals?**

## **Reflecting God’s Mercy**

Through the illustration of a plant and its shade—not to mention by bringing Nineveh to repentance in the previous chapter—God showed Jonah that He is merciful and compassionate toward all people. Jonah needed to display that same mercy, but he preferred retributive justice. God calls Christians today to respond to the grace received through Jesus by showing compassion and mercy to others—even for those who are difficult to love.

Jonah’s example should help us to consider the importance of extending God’s grace to anyone we consider undeserving. God knows their hearts, and ours. While it is better to be at peace with those around us, it is not always possible for us to see justice served or our enemies come to ruin. And this text would suggest it shouldn’t please us when we do.

God calls us to extend the same mercy to others as He has shown toward us. God will bless our efforts, whether those blessings are immediate or not. We are to be merciful because God is merciful (Luke 6:36). God knows our hearts, and He has offered forgiveness before we come to all the right conclusions. Therefore, as those who have been forgiven, we are to forgive in return (Luke 7:47).

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Matt. 5:7). His brother James is even more blunt: “Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom. . . . Mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:12–13). As we obey, God will give us peace in our hearts, and God will judge properly. Whatever anger, grudges, or violations that we cannot surrender—we are only harming ourselves.

**1 How should an awareness of God’s mercy to us help us be merciful to others?**

**2 What does God’s Word reassure us will happen when we are merciful?**

**3 Where do you lack mercy? How would you ask God to address it?**

## Grace Available to All

Followers of Jesus are grateful for the gift of grace extended to us, while we were yet sinners. Sometimes it can be hard to want others, especially those who have irritated or wronged us, to have access to that same grace.

**Find a nice day to take a walk around your neighborhood, office complex, or school campus. As you pass people's doors, pray that those people would hear and receive the gospel of grace. As the Spirit leads, pray that your heart would be as merciful as God's.**

### Key Text

Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: And should not I spare Nineveh?  
—Jonah 4:10–11a KJV

But the Lord said, “You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh?”  
—Jonah 4:10–11a NIV

### Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

#### Week of May 4 through May 9

- Mon.** Genesis 2:4–10, 15—God Ordains Productive Work.
- Tue.** Proverbs 16:1–3, 8–9—Commit Your Work to the Lord.
- Wed.** Psalm 8—Caring for the Work of God's Hands.
- Thu.** Exodus 31:12–17—The Sabbath Is a Perpetual Covenant.
- Fri.** John 5:8–11, 16–17—Working on the Sabbath.
- Sat.** Acts 20:31–35—Supporting Oneself and Others.

**Next Week:** Gen. 2:15; Ex. 20:9; John 5:17; 9:4; Acts 20:33–35; 2 Thess. 3:6–12  
*We will discuss God's intention for our working lives. How would you rate your attitude at work or when you serve others?*

# WORK AS CHRISTIAN DUTY

“Seventy-five? You don’t look seventy-five,” the young woman said to Clarence.

They were in the local hardware store. Clarence was helping the woman find the right screw.

“It seems like you enjoy what you do,” she said. “But shouldn’t you be retired?”

“I love what I do,” Clarence said with a smile. “I only work here a few hours a week. Plus I’ll be able to take a little extra money on my church’s mission trip this summer.” Clarence had worked for more than fifty years as a contractor. He was proud of the work he had done. He didn’t cut corners, and he didn’t cheat his customers. He always did quality work. But the steady job had been taxing on his body.

These days, he only did isolated jobs for special friends and family. And he couldn’t wait for a special project coming up in June. Clarence’s church was partnering with a ministry who builds homes in Guatemala. “This is my seventh construction mission,” he shared.

“I guess you don’t have any plans to slow down,” the young lady smiled, pushing her cart down the aisle.

“I’m slowing down a bit,” Clarence said as he chuckled, walking beside her. “As long as God gives me strength, I plan to keep going. And when I can’t travel, God will give me something else.”

**1 What kind of work has God called you to do?**

**2 What sorts of boundaries should we put around our working lives?**

**3 What do you anticipate are some of the different images and instructions about work in the Bible?**

<sup>15</sup> And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.

...

<sup>9</sup> Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work.

...

<sup>17</sup> But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.

<sup>4</sup> I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.

...

<sup>33</sup> I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. <sup>34</sup> Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. <sup>35</sup> I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

<sup>15</sup> The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

...

<sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work.

...

<sup>17</sup> In his defense Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working."

<sup>4</sup> "As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work."

...

<sup>33</sup> I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. <sup>34</sup> You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. <sup>35</sup> In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

## Created for Service

In the beginning, there was work to be done. In the narrative of the world's creation, even before the introduction of sin, humans are made with a productive capacity and for the purpose of expanding God's ordered creation—tending the primordial garden. The writer of Genesis 2 even anticipates this and calls out the need for someone to bring order to the earth: before humans, "there was no one to work the ground" (Gen. 2:5). God creates humanity from the ground for the purpose of bringing order to the ground.

In one form or another, all work is a continuation of these gardening skills. When Genesis is written, everyone inherits a farming or shepherding lifestyle, growing food and tending the earth directly. But in the modern age, when humans specialize in countless other professions, we still depend on the earth for food.

Even though God created humans to tend the ground, God's favor does not derive from humanity's productive efforts. In Egypt, Israel experienced what it means to be slaves—people valued only for what they can do. But as soon as God frees the Israelites from Egypt, He grants them the gift of Sabbath rest, a weekly reprieve from all work (Ex. 20:9). God loves us, even when we are unproductive.

When the Father sends His Son to show this love, Jesus says that the work of God is not finished (John 5:17). God is carrying out the plan of salvation, bringing order back to creation. God has a plan to deal with sin and death, to ensure that His work is not in vain—that our work can align with what God continues to do. Thus, when Jesus breathes His last and gives His life, He signals the completion with the words, “It is finished” (John 19:30). His work is done.

So what are Christ's followers to do? Are they invited to a life devoid of work, since the great work of redemption is at an end? Far from it! For the kingdom of God is at hand, reversing the fortunes of the weak and powerless. In all things, God's people are to work for the good of others, ensuring that the message of Jesus goes forth unhindered. Jesus spent His labor and His life to serve others, and His followers will do no less. Paul reminds church leaders of Christ's words: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

**1 Do you tend to think of work as an imposition or a blessing?**

**2 What are some ways that we overvalue our own work and let it define us?**

**3 Where do we see evidence that the work of God is still continuing to this day?**

<sup>6</sup> Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. <sup>7</sup> For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; <sup>8</sup> Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: <sup>9</sup> Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. <sup>10</sup> For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.

<sup>11</sup> For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.

<sup>12</sup> Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.

<sup>6</sup> In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. <sup>7</sup> For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, <sup>8</sup> nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. <sup>9</sup> We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate. <sup>10</sup> For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat."

<sup>11</sup> We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies. <sup>12</sup> Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat.

## Case Study: The Church of Thessalonica

In Acts 20:33–35, we read about Paul's advice for Christians to continue to work on behalf of the weak, giving generously in the same way that Christ spent His time. Probably early in the apostle Paul's ministry, he faced a challenge from the church he had founded in the large city of Thessalonica (see Acts 17:1–9). As we read what Paul says to this church, we hear him correct a misunderstanding of work that is repeated, even to this day.

For one thing, the Thessalonians were confused about the coming day of the Lord (2 Thess. 2:1–2). Since the earthly work of Christ is

complete, and salvation is already at hand, these early Christians were understandably eager to hear news of Christ's return. Some of them—perhaps certain that Christ's return would shortly make their work valueless—had given themselves over to idleness or even quitting their jobs. *If Jesus is about to appear, they thought, why continue to worry about earthly things like money?*

Paul's words against this perspective are sharp and specific. Do not let "idle" and "disruptive" people disrupt the kingdom mission (2 Thess. 3:6). The day of the Lord has not come, nor will Christ's appearance invalidate the efforts of those who continue their work so that they can eat and to use money to live (vv. 8–10). Paul is perfectly willing to say that working in order to eat is natural: it's the continuation of the gardening work that God gave humans.

But Paul and his companions could probably have argued that they were too important, too busy to be troubled to work with their hands. Instead, Paul and his ministry companions were as active at work as anyone else, providing a model for other leaders (vv. 7, 9). Does this mean that Paul would be against pastors earning a salary? Not at all, for in another context he says that ministry workers are worthy of financial support (see 1 Tim. 5:17–18). But Paul uses his own work as an example for this church: no one should spend their days with nothing to do, simply waiting for Christ's return. What kind of example would that be? The work of the kingdom is simply too important, and the work continues.

**1 When have you seen people become too concerned with knowing the day when Jesus returns?**

**2 How does Paul's example of ministry work challenge misconceptions of leadership?**

**3 When have you been tempted to undervalue your own contributions, to let kingdom work be the responsibility of others?**

## Set Free from Boredom

There is a particular week each summer when I take a vacation from my job. This isn't an ordinary vacation, however. On this particular week, I join with dozens of other volunteers who give up their time to run a camp that is exclusively for children who have been touched by the foster system. One week a year, these campers arrive to find a group of counselors, leaders, and support staff who create a world with abundant choices, good food, and a safe environment for fun and friendship.

When new volunteers show up each year, the veterans have to remind them that this will be one of the craziest and most fatiguing weeks of their lives. Even for those who have been parents, nothing can prepare someone for the amount of running around and the excitement packed into a single week. I don't think I could ever be as tired as I feel at the end of camp. It is *hard work*.

At the same time, we get the chance to see God working in the lives of the most precious children. For campers who come back, year after year, we might see growth and new confidence rise as they return to a place that so generously displays the love of Christ. But when I come back to the "real world" and to my working routine, it will often take me two weeks to process the experience and to share with my wife everything I witnessed.

We all need rest and respite; we all need times of silence and solitude. But a world without anything to do would leave us empty and cold. God created us to be spiritual beings in action, cultivators of the order of creation, and useful to our church family. Whatever confidence we have in God's good future, we can just as confident that meaningful work is at hand.

**1 What kind of activity and hard work leaves you with joy?**

**2 When have you been challenged to find meaningful work?**

**3 In God's kingdom, what is the kind of responsibility that you have been given?**

## Work as unto the Lord

It can be tempting to divide our lives into two categories: sacred and secular. But even before the introduction of sin, God gave humans work to do, so we can rightfully view our work—whether as a professional, a student, a homemaker—as an important part of our greater call to ministry.

**Write the following phrase on a sticky note: “Thank You, God, for my work. Help me to honor You in it today.” Place it in a prominent place this week, and pray that short prayer each time you see it.**

### Key Text

I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

—Acts 20:35 KJV

In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

—Acts 20:35 NIV

### Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

#### Week of May 11 through May 16

- Mon.** Proverbs 10:1–5, 15–16—Work Diligently Before God.
- Tue.** Matthew 20:1–16—The Workers and Their Wages.
- Wed.** Amos 5:6–15—God Demands Justice for All.
- Thu.** James 5:1–11—Wait Patiently for God’s Justice.
- Fri.** Colossians 3:12–17—Serving with Enthusiasm.
- Sat.** Deuteronomy 24:14–21—Justice for the Worker.

**Next Week:** Deut. 24:14–21; Eph. 6:5–9; 1 Tim. 6:17–19

*We will discuss the economic justice that God wants us to seek in our working lives. Does God bring to mind any person or group who is not paid fairly?*

# CHRISTIAN MANNER OF JUSTICE

Jerricka blinked as she stared at the screen. There were the results of her mammogram. The doctor was talking again.

“This is the area that looks suspicious. It can always turn out to be nothing, but we need to schedule more tests.”

Jerricka could hardly believe it. Breast cancer? She exercised regularly, ate a good diet, all the things. As a secretary at her church, it wasn't long before dozens of people on the prayer chain were reaching out to offer encouragement.

One woman in her Bible study stopped by with a card. “I just have to ask,” the woman said with kind eyes, “how are you doing financially? Do you think this is going to set you back?”

Jerricka thought for a moment. She'd been so concerned about everything else. She's hardly thought about what everything might cost, if she needed treatment or surgery.

“You know,” she said shrugging her shoulders, “I think I'm going to be alright. The church helped me get on a health plan when I started working here. I think there's even a fund for medical expenses.”

“I *know* that has been a major focus in the past,” said Faith. “The elders wanted staff to be healthy, to have what they needed.”

“It's just one more reason I'm grateful for this community,” said Jerricka, trying not to get misty.

**1 Do you ask for help quickly, or is that hard for you to do?**

**2 What is the responsibility of a church community to care for financial needs?**

<sup>14</sup> Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates: <sup>15</sup> At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the LORD, and it be sin unto thee.

<sup>16</sup> The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.

<sup>17</sup> Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge: <sup>18</sup> But thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee thence: therefore I command thee to do this thing.

<sup>19</sup> When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands. <sup>20</sup> When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. <sup>21</sup> When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

<sup>14</sup> Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether that worker is a fellow Israelite or a foreigner residing in one of your towns. <sup>15</sup> Pay them their wages each day before sunset, because they are poor and are counting on it. Otherwise they may cry to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin.

<sup>16</sup> Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin.

<sup>17</sup> Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. <sup>18</sup> Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.

<sup>19</sup> When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

<sup>20</sup> When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. <sup>21</sup> When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow.

## Providing for All

In his parting words to Israel, Moses gives instruction for life in the promised land. God redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt; He requires their just and generous treatment of the poor and powerless among them: hired workers, foreigners, orphans, and widows.

Moses addresses employers, cautioning that they are not to take advantage of anyone hired (vv. 14–15). They must treat workers—both Israelites and foreigners—fairly and justly (Deut. 24:14). Consider the practical realities facing people who live “paycheck to paycheck” (as we say today). Timely payment of a day’s wages could spell the difference between having food to eat or not. But if the powerful take advantage of the powerless, God will hear the cries of the oppressed—just as He heard the cries of Hebrew slaves (Ex. 3:7). Moses warns that economic exploitation is a sin (Deut. 24:15).

In the same context, God answers a general question: *Who is responsible for crimes?* Instead of punishing families together for capital offenses, He holds individuals responsible for their own sins (v. 16). This prevents a variety of abuses, with innocent people receiving guilt by association.

Finally, God gives specific requirements for the protection of the destitute (vv. 17–21). All people are deserving of justice, and it is never acceptable to take clothes from another’s back (v. 17). This “pledge” refers to collateral for a loan (since handwoven garments are valuable). God is telling the loaner to make it easy for the person who needs financial help. Owners of fields, orchards, and vineyards must deliberately leave extra food around, free for “the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow” (vv. 19–21). In the promised land, there shall be more than enough for everyone (see 15:4–8). And if God’s people share with the needy, they invite the Lord to bring even more abundant blessing (v. 19).

**1 Why are hired workers and destitute people a focus here?**

**2 What similarities and differences do you see between Israel’s system of justice and welfare and ours?**

<sup>5</sup> Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; <sup>6</sup> Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; <sup>7</sup> With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: <sup>8</sup> Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. <sup>9</sup> And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.

...

<sup>17</sup> Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; <sup>18</sup> That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; <sup>19</sup> Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

<sup>5</sup> Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. <sup>6</sup> Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. <sup>7</sup> Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, <sup>8</sup> because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free. <sup>9</sup> And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

...

<sup>17</sup> Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. <sup>18</sup> Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. <sup>19</sup> In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

## Trusting God, Treating Others Fairly

In Ephesians 5:21–6:9, Paul writes what is called a *household code*, applying the gospel to various relationships of daily life. “Slave”—we need precision with this word. The systems of slavery in the ancient world are *not* synonymous with the system of race-based chattel

slavery in America. Often, slaves in ancient Israel and Rome were indentured—people who sold themselves out of financial necessity, yet by choice, and who could still achieve social mobility. At the same time, slaves were regarded as property and subjected to abuse. In a world of masters and slaves, Paul saw the gospel at work, even among fundamentally unjust relationships.

Notice, Paul addresses the lower-status group first. For slaves, Paul requires obedience to their masters (v. 5). But Paul reorients their status by calling them “slaves of Christ,” their service as “doing the will of God from your heart . . . as if you were serving the Lord” (vv. 6–7). Adopting this point of view, slaves can offer obedience “with sincerity of heart,” even to flawed human masters, for God will regard wholehearted devotion as good that is being done for Him (v. 8).

To masters, Paul issues a subversive command: Treat slaves “in the same way” as slaves were asked to treat them (v. 9). Masters must offer heartfelt respect, not hateful threats. After all, both groups have a greater master in heaven. The world is partial to the powerful, but God is not (v. 9). Paul lays a foundation that will ultimately undermine and tear down systems of slavery.

But in 1 Timothy 6, Paul tackles the other worldly force that props up systems of oppression: money. His instructions are for “those who are rich in this present world” not to trust in riches. Wealth is not a foundation of hope. Wealth is “uncertain” (v. 17).

Paul again reframes social standards: The wealthy should not think highly of themselves. God is the owner and giver of riches (v. 17). They should consider spiritual wealth—being “rich in good deeds”—as more valuable (v. 18). God requires generosity and sharing (v. 18). Living this way, the wealthy will find the surer footing and “firm foundation” that comes from treasures kept safe in heaven (v. 20; see Matt. 6:19–24).

**1 “Slaves, obey your earthly masters” (Eph. 6:5). Does this statement make you uncomfortable? Should it?**

**2 What is surprising about Paul’s instructions for masters?**

**3 Imagine a church community that does not “put their hope in wealth” (1 Tim. 6:17). Describe it.**

## Holding Wealth Loosely

We talk about how to handle our money when it often feels more like our money handles us. No matter how much or little we have, it never feels like enough to satisfy our desires or allay our fears. And we can't shake the reality that money correlates with power, and that those who have less are at the mercy of those who have more.

The Bible offers us a way out of money's grip: to hold our money with an open hand. We can begin to do this with two changes of mindset.

First, we can abandon a scarcity mindset, the voice in our head that tells us, *There's not enough for everyone—you have to fight to get yours*. The Bible paints a different picture. God “richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment” (1 Tim. 6:17). God has not made a world where we must fight for our “piece.” Instead, we share to have peace. There is no certainty or peace in the possession of wealth.

Second, instead of lording our money and power over others (or wishing we could), we can “have the same mindset as Christ Jesus,” who became a servant (Phil. 2:6–7). Servants have no wealth to be concerned about, and they focus on the needs of others. Regardless of our bank accounts or social standing, we have the one Master and one Lord (Matt. 23:10; Col. 4:1; Eph. 4:5).

Approaching our money and possessions with an abundance and servant mindset, we become as free in our sharing as in our receiving. While we work to provide for ourselves and our families, we can also help those around us who are struggling. There's no shortage of people needing help. We can make our churches places where the poor and the powerless experience God's abundance through Christlike generosity. And when we hold money with open hands, we rediscover “life that is truly life” (1 Tim. 6:19)—God's abundance.

**1 How would the world be different if everyone adopted an “abundance mindset”?**

**2 How easy or difficult is it for you to see yourself as a servant?**

**3 We live in an era of long lifespans, retirement planning, and long-term care. What does it look like to balance responsibility (saving) and generosity (sharing)?**

## Blessed to Be a Blessing

Most of us won't spend our workday harvesting in the fields, but all of us have opportunities to bless those around us as an extension of God's grace. Just before you enter your workplace this week, pray this simple prayer. You might want to write it on a card to tuck into your wallet. If you don't work a formal job, you can pray this before heading to the store, the gym, anyplace you'll be around others.

*Lord, open my eyes to an opportunity to bless someone else today.*

### Key Text

When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands.

—Deuteronomy 24:19 KJV

When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

—Deuteronomy 24:19 NIV

## Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

### Week of May 18 through May 23

**Mon.** John 2:1–11—A Feast of Finest Wine.

**Tue.** Genesis 21:1–8—Celebrate God's Blessings.

**Wed.** Zechariah 8:1–5—Playing Children Signal God's Grace.

**Thu.** Colossians 2:16–23—Release from Human Rules.

**Fri.** Matthew 11:7–11, 16–19—A Time for Feasting and Joy.

**Sat.** Jeremiah 31:10–14—Rejoice and Be Glad.

**Next Week:** Mark 2:18–28

*We will talk about the freedom we enjoy as Christ's servants. Jesus is Lord of every moment. What day or time do you claim for spending with your Lord?*

# CHRISTIAN RHYTHMS OF LIFE

It was 7:45 am, and Kristopher was replying to an email. He had been in the office for about fifteen minutes already, an early start. His four-year-old was already safely squared away at daycare too, and light traffic landed him at work early. He needed the time! There was a major project to complete by end of the week.

Ten minutes later, Kristopher's coworker was leaning against the side of his cubicle, holding a cup of coffee. "Hey, man. The way the boss has treated you, I would have thought that you would care less."

Kristopher's coworker was talking about the gossip of the office. All he knew for certain was that someone had leaked information about a clients. People kept telling him that the division head was going to blame him, and his supervisor was opening an investigation.

Kristopher was blindsided. He had even been interviewed by the his Human Resources Director and cleared of any wrongdoing. The rumors didn't stop. Everyone was waiting to see if someone would lose their job.

"What are you going to do?" his wife had cried.

"I'm going to continue to do what I've been doing," he told her. "I can't control the craziness." *God of Jacob, You will defend me*, he had prayed.

"Man, you know that I'm just going to keep doing my job," Kristopher said looking up from his screen. "I'm going to keep doing my job, to the best of my ability."

**1 What does it look like to have Christ at the center of our lives while we work in the secular world?**

**2 What is the difference between receiving human approval and receiving God's approval?**

<sup>18</sup> And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not?

<sup>19</sup> And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. <sup>20</sup> But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.

<sup>21</sup> No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse.

<sup>22</sup> And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles.

<sup>18</sup> Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?"

<sup>19</sup> Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. <sup>20</sup> But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.

<sup>21</sup> "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. <sup>22</sup> And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins."

## A Time for Feasting and Fasting

*Why no fasting?* the people are asking Jesus. They observe that John the Baptist's disciples and Pharisees are in the habit, but Jesus' disciples are not (Mark 2:18). It strikes them as remarkable, maybe even a sign that Jesus is not as devout as He seems.

Fasting was a significant practice in Judaism. The Old Testament prescribes fasting on the Day of Atonement. Even though weekly fasting was not required by the law, regular fasts were common. They showed a commitment to prayer, repentance, or even lament for national crises: war, famine, and plagues (see 2 Sam 12:16; Ps 35:13; Zech 7:3–4; 8:19). Fasting was an integral part of Jewish life, so much so that it raised doubts if Jesus' disciples were not participating. *Didn't Jesus care about the nation?* Of course He did! *Was*

*Jesus setting aside time for prayer? More than most! Does Jesus keep the ancestral traditions?* In most cases, He does!

Jesus responds with a wedding analogy: “How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?” (v. 19). Subtly, Jesus is communicating that today is a special time, a joyous celebration. As long as the bridegroom is at the wedding, no one should be fasting. Jesus does not dismiss the legitimacy of fasting. He assures them that the bridegroom will eventually be taken away. When that day comes, His disciples will fast (v. 20). In the analogy, Jesus is the bridegroom. He is talking about His coming arrest and death. But for now, He’s right here. When Jesus is with you, it is time to celebrate. There will be time for grief and mourning later.

To emphasize that He is not just any important teacher, Jesus tells two miniparables. First, new cloth cannot be sewn onto an old garment. New cloth shrinks, and the clothes would tear (v. 21). Second, one tries to reuse old wineskins to store new wine. As the wine ages, the old wineskins would not stretch but burst (v. 22).

These tiny analogies are not as familiar to us as the original hearers, but the point is not hard to understand: something new is at hand. If people around Jesus are expecting Him to confirm everything they already think to be true, they will struggle. Jesus is the bridegroom, the most honored guest. Everything that came before was leading up to this moment. When He teaches, the people recognize that His words are full of authority (Mark 1:27). Mark doesn’t want to spoil the surprise, but if you are paying attention, you’ll know that Jesus is reconfiguring His contemporaries’ imaginations.

**1 Why didn’t Jesus’ disciples fast?**

**2 Why can’t Jesus just go along with everything that the religious people thought to be important?**

**3 When have you had the experience of struggling to explain something about Jesus?**

<sup>23</sup> And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn. <sup>24</sup> And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful?

<sup>25</sup> And he said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungred, he, and they that were with him? <sup>26</sup> How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him?

<sup>27</sup> And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: <sup>28</sup> Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.

<sup>23</sup> One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. <sup>24</sup> The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?”

<sup>25</sup> He answered, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? <sup>26</sup> In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.”

<sup>27</sup> Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. <sup>28</sup> So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

## People Come First

Mark 2:23 introduces another controversial event in Jesus’ ministry. On the Sabbath, Jesus and His disciples are walking through some grainfields, and the disciples pick heads of grain to eat. The Pharisees see this and, once again, confront Jesus. The Pharisees accuse the disciples of doing something unlawful on the Sabbath (v. 24). But what starts out as a question of Sabbath rules turns into a deeper conversation about Jesus and His authority.

The Pharisees’ accusation against the disciples is rooted in their interpretation of the Mosaic law. They argue that by picking grain, the disciples violate Exodus 20:8–11, which prohibits work on the Sabbath. Even though Exodus 20 does not define “work,” rabbinic tradition identified thirty-nine categories of work, all prohibited on the Sabbath. Among the prohibitions is reaping. Isn’t that what the disciples are doing by picking grain?

Jesus responds with a compelling scriptural argument (2:25–26). He references a story from 1 Samuel 21:1–6, when David broke normal regulations. He and his men were starving and facing deadly peril. David asked the priest for bread; and he accepted consecrated bread, the kind placed before God’s holy presence. Only priests were permitted to eat it.

David’s actions are more serious than picking heads of grain, yet he is not condemned for them. In his case, hunger took precedence over the law. Sabbath was not intended as a rigid system of onerous observances, and Jesus knows better.

In Mark 2:27, Jesus makes a stunningly simple observation: “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” The Pharisees are focused on displaying religious devotion. They placed a heavy burden on the people (see Matt. 23:4). But Jesus reorients the conversation, pointing them to the story of creation. *Which came first, humans or Sabbath?*

As Jesus reasons, people are not created to observe Sabbath. The Sabbath is intended for them. It is not designed as a burden, one that leaves hungry people unable to eat. Even the word *Sabbath* means simply “rest” or “cease.” Sabbath belongs to God, when all people turn their attention to the one who rescued them (see Ex. 31:13).

Jesus concludes His argument by saying, “The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:28). Here, “Son of Man” is Jesus’ title for Himself. Jesus is saying that He is the one who has authority over Sabbath. He has the rightful authority to interpret and to make judgments about Sabbath. The day that belongs to God is something Jesus claims is under His authority.

**1 What makes the gleaning of the disciples objectionable to the Pharisees?**

**2 Why does Jesus refer back to David and the bread he ate?**

**3 What are the implications if Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath?**

## Jesus at the Center

Fasting and Sabbath observance are practices that can seem strange and foreign to the modern world. But notice that many people are obsessed with productivity, self-care, time-management, and dieting. We track steps, schedule rest, and follow rules about what we should and should not do with our bodies and our time. While we don't face the same religious pressures, many of us can relate to the burden of constantly trying to "do it right." Whether it's how we eat, rest, or work, the pressure to live by human-imposed rules can feel relentless.

This is what makes Jesus' teaching in Mark 2:18–28 so striking. He does not dismiss fasting or observing the Sabbath as outdated or irrelevant. Rather, He redefines these practices, centering them on Himself. When questioned about fasting, Jesus reminds the people that His presence invites joyous celebration. The time for fasting and mourning comes when He is absent. When His disciples are criticized for not following Sabbath traditions, Jesus responds by saying that the Sabbath is *for people*, not vice versa. As Lord of the Sabbath, He has authority to interpret a God-honoring Sabbath routine.

It is easy for people to focus on outward appearances, but Scripture shows that God observes the heart (see 1 Sam. 16:7). Fasting, which is useful in times of intense prayer, expresses dependence on God. Likewise, Sabbath serves as a reminder that God is our provider, giving rest to the weary.

Fasting and Sabbath are not ends in themselves, but they should point us to Jesus. He fulfills our deepest hunger and gives us true rest. He should be at the center of our fasting, prayer, rest, and work. When our lives revolve around Jesus, these practices become life-giving instead of burdensome. Only through Him can we find true rest and fulfillment.

**1 In what ways can people miss the point of fasting and observing the Sabbath today?**

**2 How might knowing that the Sabbath was made for people challenge your view of rest?**

**3 What are some practical ways we can keep Jesus as the center of our lives?**

## Embracing Rest

The Sabbath is a gift from God, designed not as a burden but a delight. Once a week we are invited to rest and enjoy the Creator and His creation. If a Sabbath is already part of your rhythm, write down how you hope to spend it. If Sabbath is not your routine, plan a Sabbath with the Lord of Sabbath.

*Jesus, may You be at the center of all my time. This is what I have in mind:*

### Key Text

And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath. —Mark 2:27–28 KJV

Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” —Mark 2:27–28 NIV

### Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

#### Week of May 25 through May 30

- Mon.** Psalm 95—Let Us Sing to the Lord.
- Tue.** Psalm 122—Gladness in the House of the Lord.
- Wed.** Romans 12:1–8—Members of the Body of Christ.
- Thu.** Nehemiah 8:9–12—A Holy Day of Rejoicing.
- Fri.** Matthew 18:15–20—Restoring Healthy Relationships..
- Sat.** Acts 4:32–37—Fellowship Through Common Property.

**Next Week:** Matthew 28:18–20; Hebrews 10:22–25

*This will be the last week of the spring quarter. In any of the studies the past several weeks, has God been inviting you to something new?*

# LIVING IN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Kaylen glanced around the waiting room. She was back at the doctor again. She looked at her phone and saw that her friend Michelle was texting. Then she reminded herself of the plan, and put the phone in her bag where she wouldn't be tempted.

After having to sit in so many waiting rooms lately, she had decided to keep from being on her phone in these situations. It made it easier to engage with the people she met.

"I think that's a fantastic way to look at it," her Michelle had encouraged her. Of course now it was Michelle who was texting!

Just as Kaylen resettled in her seat, a very frazzled young mom came in, grabbed her paperwork, and took a seat to the right. Her two children looked like they knew the drill, darting off to find a some toys in the corner of the waiting room.

"Long day?" Kaylen inquired, offering her nicest smile.

The woman was obviously surprised that someone was speaking. She put her hand to her chest and said, "My ex was the one who scheduled an appointment for my boy in the middle of the day. I don't know how he thought I would get here in time."

It went on like that for a few moments before Kaylen's name was called, and the conversation came to a close. Then when she was walking to her car, she ran into the lady again.

"You know, why don't you come to my Bible study on Saturday?" she offered. "There are some other moms with young kids, and I bet you would love to meet them!"

**1 Do you try to be present and paying attention to the opportunities God sends? How?**

**2 Why do you think Scripture emphasizes encouraging others?**

<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. <sup>19</sup> Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: <sup>20</sup> Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

<sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

## Christ’s Great Commission

The risen Jesus stands before His disciples on the mountain in Galilee. Some of His disciples, though seeing Him right before them and worshiping Him, doubt—or perhaps hesitate—and are still unsure of what Jesus’ death and resurrection means concerning His identity and the future creation (see Matt 28:17). But with Jesus’ death and resurrection, He has received “all authority in heaven and on earth” (v. 18). To His Jewish audience, this would be an allusion to the authority and everlasting dominion given to the “son of man” figure in Daniel 7:13–14.

Jesus fulfills this vision. His death and resurrection reveals Him to be the rightful king over all creation, greater than any power of darkness—greater than death itself. Jesus’ authority means that the kingdom of heaven has come near (Matt. 4:17). Through Jesus, God has asserted His rule over His creation. The risen Jesus is reigning now, mending His broken world and giving new life. He is working to put all things right and make all things new.

With His authority already established, Jesus sends the disciples on a kingdom-building task: “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). This statement might have been unexpected to the disciples. Jesus was asking them to not only make disciples within Israel, but in all the nations. This is exactly as God promised long before, that He would bless all peoples through Abraham, through Jesus, a son of Abraham (see Gen. 12:3; Matt. 1:2–16). Jesus is the Messiah,

the one who brings God’s salvation to the ends of the earth (see Isa. 49:6). The news of this salvation and blessing spreads as followers of Jesus carry it to the nations, so that more and more people bow their hearts, minds, and lives to the authority of the risen Christ.

Part of the disciples’ role in their outreach is to baptize those who follow Christ. This baptism serves as an initiation into the faith and a way for new disciples to publicly identify themselves with the death and resurrection of Jesus, signifying their newness of life (see Rom. 6:1–4). Moreover, it is a way to publicly identify with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus’ inclusion as “the Son” attests to His divinity alongside Father and Spirit.

Jesus tells His followers that making disciples also means instructing them how to live as followers of God (Matt. 28:20). Thus, Jesus’ kingdom extends throughout the earth as more people follow His ways. Obedience to Jesus becomes a sign of new life in Christ, a way of expressing love to Jesus (see John 14:15–21).

Jesus concludes His commission by telling the disciples that He will be with them, even until “the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). The reminder of Jesus’ constant presence—another sign of His divinity—is meant to strengthen and comfort His followers in their disciple-making task, as they await the end of the age. Now, in His power and presence, Jesus’ disciples can tell the world about Him and the newness of life they have received as emissaries of the kingdom.

**1 What is the significance of Jesus’ claim to authority?**

**2 In what ways do Christians experience God’s kingdom on earth?**

**3 What does the Christian community look like in these verses?**

<sup>22</sup> Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) <sup>24</sup> And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: <sup>25</sup> Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

<sup>22</sup> Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

## The Life of Faith, Lived Together

In the verses leading up to Hebrews 10:22, the author explains that followers of Jesus can approach God in confidence, because of Jesus' once-for-all sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus—the great high priest—has made fellowship with God possible.

The author exhorts believers to draw near to God—that is, to seek His presence. It is to be done “with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings” (Heb. 10:22). Seeking God in this way is possible because of the blood of the new covenant, shed by Jesus on the cross. The blood of Jesus removes guilt and cleanses the conscience. The “hearts sprinkled” in verse 22 recalls the inauguration of the old covenant, when the Israelites were sprinkled with the blood of calves by Moses (see Ex. 24:8; Heb. 9:18–20).

Followers of Jesus now have *hearts* sprinkled by the blood of Jesus—renewed hearts are a sign of the new covenant (Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:26–27). Believers also have “bodies washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:22), which is likely a reference to baptism and the inward spiritual cleansing from faith in Jesus. These realities strengthen the resolve of believers, so that they can be near God with confidence and assurance.

In verse 23, the writer of Hebrews tells followers of Jesus to “hold unswervingly to the hope we profess” (Heb. 10:23). This would be important for readers, who faced pressure and persecution from Gentiles or Jews. The latter would be pressuring Jewish Christians to return to practices that undermined their belief in the all-sufficiency of Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice. Instead, Hebrews encourages believers to hold to the conviction that Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s covenant promises. They can do this because “the one who promised is faithful” (Heb. 10:23). Hope is not wasted on Jesus.

Beginning in verse 24, the author promotes participation in the life of the church community: togetherness and mutual encouragement. He wants believers to consider how they can “spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Heb. 10:23). This means several things: finding ways to contribute to the mission, loving one another, loving neighbors, spreading the good news about Jesus and His kingdom.

Urging one another to what is good is *essential* to the Christian life, which is why the author tells believers not to give up meeting (v. 25). Apparently, some in the community were doing this, perhaps out of fear of persecution. But a believer does not flourish in isolation, apart from the mutual encouragement of the church community. Thus, verses 24–25 stress togetherness as a key to spiritual health and effective participation in God’s work.

The author of Hebrews tells believers to continue “encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:25). Like Jesus in Matthew 28:20, he has eyes on the end of the age—the day when Jesus will return and set all things right. As believers work toward that day, they draw comfort and strength from the presence of their Lord (see Matt. 28:20) and the encouragement of His people.

**1 What makes it possible for us to draw near to God in faith?**

**2 On what basis can Christians hold unswervingly to hope, even in the face of persecution?**

**3 Why is steady participation in Christian community important?**

## **Finding My Part**

The first youth group camp I ever went to was a missions camp in West Palm Beach. We spent the week participating in various projects and outreaches around the city. It was hot and humid, and it felt like we were breathing peanut butter. But my thirteen-year-old body didn't mind. I was just excited to be part of whatever God was doing in the sunshine state.

I carried that excitement home with me; and others started to notice, including my youth pastor. I confided in him that I wanted to be a "preacher man" when I grew up. It made him chuckle, but I didn't really know what it meant at the time. I just knew I wanted to participate in the life of the church.

That youth pastor started looking out for me and spurring me on. He named strengths he saw in me and gave me opportunities to serve. He wasn't the only one, either. I can picture the faces of Sunday school teachers, friends, and family members who encouraged me to find my part in God's story and the mission of God's people.

As I got older, there were others: a pastor who invited me to preach, even when I was young and inexperienced; a woman in the church who allowed me to be part of her ministry in a low-income neighborhood; a classmate who went out of his way to tell me I had done a good job on a presentation. These were brothers and sisters in Christ who invested time and energy in me—who helped me find my way.

God has a mission for each of us, a way to participate in sharing the good news about Jesus. As believers we have the opportunity to help one another discover what it is, by encouraging and strengthening one another. Together, we do great work for God's kingdom, knowing that Jesus is with us to the very end.

**1 What experiences have gotten you excited about participating in the mission of the church?**

**2 How have others encouraged you or spurred you on to discover God's mission for you?**

**3 How can you encourage others to find their place in God's mission?**

## Living on Mission

Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations may seem intimidating. Yet we know that God equips those He calls, so we can live out our mission confidently! After you take a moment to ponder and to answer the prompt below (naming qualities, skills, or passions that God has placed within you), share this with friend. Take the courageous step of letting someone else speak into the strengths they see in you.

I believe God made me \_\_\_\_\_,  
so that I can make disciples.

### Key Text

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised).  
—Hebrews 10:23 KJV

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.  
—Hebrews 10:23 NIV

## Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

### Week of June 1 through June 6

- Mon.** 1 Timothy 3:1–7—A Leadership Example.
- Tue.** Acts 9:36–42—A Leader Who Cares.
- Wed.** Acts 18:24–28—A Leader Who Teaches.
- Thu.** Nehemiah 2:1–8—A Leader Who Listens.
- Fri.** Nehemiah 4:1–6—A Leader Who Intercedes.
- Sat.** John 13:3–17—A Leader Who Serves.

**Next Week:** Judges 4:4–10, 14, 21–22

*We will start a new study of faithful witnesses in Scripture. See if you can't name a few characters of Scripture who fit this description.*

# Mary Prince



## Wrongfully Convicted, Exonerated, Welcomed as Part of the Carter Family

*By Victoria McAfee*

On January 9, 2025, relatives and friends gathered to celebrate the life of former President Jimmy Carter at Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Georgia. Near the end of the funeral service, a small act of kindness was captured by cameras and the media. The former president's daughter made a profound gesture of welcome, inviting an elderly African American woman to sit with the family. This act might seem minor, but it made perfect sense for those who know the story of Mary Prince and her connection to the Carter family. Through their relationship, we see a picture of family that breaks racial boundaries and transcends social class. For Christians, it paints an image of the community of Christ's kingdom.

*Find the text continued at this link:*



**International Sunday School Lessons**  
**Bible Study Plan**  
 For 2023–2026

	Fall	Winter	Spring	Summer
2023– 2024	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>God’s Law is Love</b></p> Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Faith that Pleases God</b></p> Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Chronicles, Proverbs, Isaiah, Daniel, Habakkuk, Matthew, Luke, Romans, Hebrews	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Examining Our Faith</b></p> Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, Romans, 2 Corinthians, 1 Peter, Jude	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Hope in the Lord</b></p> Psalms, Lamentations, Acts, Romans, 2 Corinthians, Colossians, Hebrews, 1 Thessalonians, Titus, 1 John
2024– 2025	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Worship in the Covenant Community</b></p> Genesis, Exodus, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Psalms, John	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>A King Forever and Ever</b></p> Ruth, 2 Samuel, Psalms, Matthew, Luke	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Costly Sacrifices</b></p> Exodus, Leviticus, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Matthew, Hebrews, 1 John, Revelation	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Sacred Alters and Holy Gifts</b></p> Genesis, Matthew, Luke, John, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Hebrews, 1 Peter
2025– 2026	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Judah, From Isaiah to Exile</b></p> 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Enduring Beliefs of the Church</b></p> Exodus, Psalms, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, 2 Timothy, 1 John, Revelation	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Social Teachings of the Church</b></p> Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Nehemiah, Psalms, Isaiah, Daniel, Jonah, Gospels, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, Hebrews, James	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The Testimony of Faithful Witnesses</b></p> Judges, 1 Samuel, Amos, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, 2 Timothy, Philemon

# COMING NEXT QUARTER

June 2026 – August 2026

## The Testimony of Faithful Witnesses

The summer quarter introduces women and men of the Bible who heard the call of God, responded in faith, and testified to God's mercy and fidelity to His promises. The first unit examines four Old Testament stories that show God's faithfulness to Deborah, Hannah, Jonathan, and the prophet Amos. The second unit considers four people who showed God's grace and power: a Roman centurion, Simon Peter, Zacchaeus, and Mary. These stories invite us to recognize God's ability to transform and to use unlikely people. The third unit examines five famous disciples who are remembered for their willingness to believe the good news: Thomas, Stephen, Saul, Timothy, and Lydia

**Texts for study:** Judges, 1 Samuel, Amos, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, 2 Timothy

*Lessons of this Student Guide are organized according to a thematic study of the Bible, following the International Sunday School Lessons series (ISSL). In six years, this cycle will touch on the Bible's key themes through studies of books in both Old and New Testaments.*

A vibrant field of orange cosmos flowers with dark centers, growing on tall green stems. The flowers are scattered across the frame, with some in sharp focus and others blurred in the background. The sky is a clear, bright blue with soft, white clouds. The overall mood is peaceful and uplifting.

Come to me, all  
you who are weary  
and burdened, and I  
will give you rest.

—Matthew 11:28

# JOIN US. SPREAD THE GOSPEL. CHANGE THE WORLD.



We believe in equipping the local church with Christ-centered resources that empower believers, even in the most challenging places on earth.

We trust that God is always at work, in the power of Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit, inviting people into relationship with Him.

We are committed to spreading the gospel throughout the world—across villages, cities, and nations. We trust that the Word of God will transform lives and communities by bringing light to the darkness.

As a global ministry with a 150-year legacy, David C Cook is dedicated to this mission. Each time you purchase a resource or donate, you're supporting a ministry—helping spread the gospel, disciple believers, and raise up leaders in some of the world's most underserved regions.

Your support fuels this mission.

Your partnership sends the gospel where it's needed most.



Discover more. Be the difference.  
Visit [DavidCCook.org/Donate](https://DavidCCook.org/Donate)

**DAVID C COOK**<sup>™</sup>  
*A Nonprofit Ministry Equipping  
the Global Church*