

FEBRUARY 2023

inspiration

M A G A Z I N E

Count
it all *Joy*

George
Washington
Carver

God's
Beautiful
Truth

Make
Happy
Happen

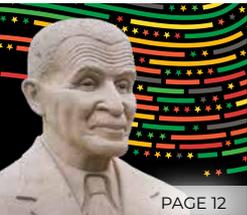
Count It All Joy!



PAGE 10



There's no doubt about it—life delivers up some difficult days. Thankfully, we know Jesus' words are eternally true, and He promised to give us joy that can never be stolen! Check out David's article on **page 5** to see how we can rely on His joy in every circumstance in life.



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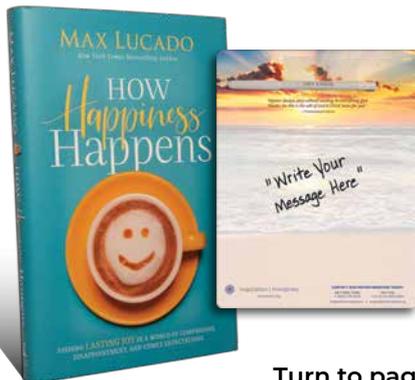
In Pursuit of God's Promises

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Turn to **page 28**

for details about our THANK YOU GIFTS this month. Act quickly—our supplies are limited.



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EDITOR'S CORNER



Roone Acree

This month's magazine is all about the joy of the Lord. God's goodness shows up in our lives in many ways—and this month we bring you great stories of God's work in and through the lives of those who love Him. As Christians, we are the most blessed people on earth, and we need to be joyful as we walk out our faith.

Take a moment and send me a note about how God has revealed His joy to you lately.

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February 1-10

Peace IS possible. Living debt free can happen. Tune in to these words of hope and practical, biblical advice from David Cerullo.

February 13-24

You are a citizen of the Kingdom of God with a vital mission here on earth! Terrell Murphy reveals the components of Kingdom life that you need to operate from a position of power.



STRENGTHEN
your walk
with David Cerullo

Why do so many believers struggle to live in the joy of the Lord? For some people, finding joy is like trying to catch a butterfly. No matter how hard they try, the butterfly seems to evade their grasp.

God is a joyful God, and since we're His children...since we're living in His grace and love...we should be joyful, too, amen? Having joy means we are in right relationship with our Father God. It shows that we have given Him full control over our circumstances and have made ourselves willing vessels for Him to use.

Look at Jesus' life, and you can see this remarkable principle at work. Everywhere He went, Jesus was walking in the fullness of God's joy and constantly giving that joy away to others.

One day as He healed a crippled woman, she stood up and began praising God (Luke 13:13). Remember that wonderful story? Or when the leprous man was healed, the man returned to Jesus joyful and "praising God in a loud voice" (Luke 17:15 NIV). There's no question that Christ wanted to show His grace for people by bringing joy to their lives. He was empowered

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by the spirit of compassion and a desire to transform people's hearts for eternity.

Yet perhaps you're thinking, David, *I've experienced the joy of the Lord at times, but lately it seems to have vanished.*

I've got good news, my friend. Although we've all had times when God's joy seemed a distant memory, we can pray the same prayer King David once prayed: *"Restore to me the joy of Your salvation"* (Psalm 51:12). When you come to the Lord with a contrite heart, as David did, you can be confident He will answer your prayer!

THE SOURCE OF TRUE JOY

With such a great promise about a joy-filled life, why are so many Christians not experiencing the abounding joy God offers? When the life of faith is supposed to be *"joy unspeakable and full of glory"* (1 Peter 1:8 KJV), why are so many believers downcast?

Entire books have been written to address this question, but the primary answer is actually quite simple: Too often, people are pursuing joy and happiness as commodities outside of an intimate relationship with their Heavenly Father. They think that if they can just change their circumstances and get what they want out of life, joy will automatically fill their hearts. But it doesn't work that way.

At the center of God's joy is our Lord and Savior, Jesus. He is the heart of our faith and thanksgiving. Our joy begins with our surrendering to Christ and letting Him transform us top to bottom into what He is.

When we have joy in Jesus, it's absolutely complete joy within us. It's not just a feeling of happiness we get on an occasional, emotional high. It's *"joy inexpressible and full of glory"* that

continues in us even when we face challenging and difficult times (1 Peter 1:8).

King David was a man after God's own heart, and he had a keen understanding of the source of his joy: *"In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore"* (Psalm 16:11).

Friend, if you're seeking more joy in your life today, I hope you'll let these words sink in. The only place to find lasting joy is in the presence of the Lord. Your circumstances may bounce up and down like a yo-yo, but your joy can be steadfast because of *Jesus'* joy within you (John 15:11).

No wonder the apostle Paul could write, *"Rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS"* (Philippians 4:4). He knew his joy wasn't based on his circumstances, for he was writing these words from a prison cell!

TRUST AND OBEY

As Jesus reassured His disciples about His coming death, He said, *"Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you"* (John 16:22).

What better message for us as well? Joy isn't a hat we can wear one day and leave at home the next. It's an attitude of our heart that is always with us. It's a mindset that is critical to a life of abundant blessings and is part of our new nature in Christ that nurtures life from within.

Joy is ours when Christ lives in us. This is why it's vital to confess Him as Lord to receive the wonderful miracle of His presence in our lives. As Psalm 35:9 says, *"My soul shall be joyful in the LORD; it shall rejoice in His salvation."* We're made alive through Him when we surrender everything at His feet.

My soul shall be joyful in the LORD; it shall rejoice in His salvation.

Psalm 35:9

Our joy begins with our surrendering to Christ and letting Him transform us top to bottom into what He is.

When you put God at the center, He'll give you joy unspeakable.

Do you remember the great old hymn that says, "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey"? If you think about it, this is God's objective for you today: to impact the world by being "happy in Jesus," to be joyful and content in Him.

But it's crucial to understand that the Christian life is not meant to be lived simply by studying what Jesus did and trying to duplicate His example in your own strength. Rather than just being a script to be read and acted out, the Christian life is Jesus living His life through you by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible promises in Colossians 3:4, "*When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.*" Notice that Jesus doesn't just give you life, He IS your life! That's why the apostle Paul says in Galatians 2:20, "*It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.*"

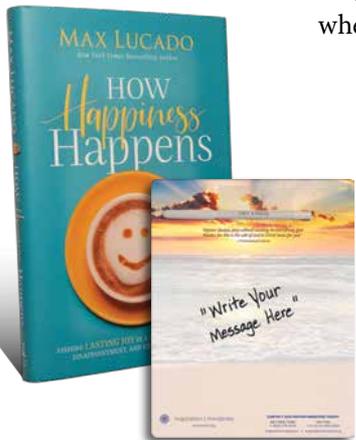
Remember, my friend, Christ alone is your salvation. He is the firm anchor for your faith in whom you can always trust and believe. When you put Him at the center, He'll give you joy unspeakable because of His everlasting goodness and power.

His blessings are real...and so is YOUR JOY when it's based firmly in Him.

God Bless,



P.S. My special THANK YOU GIFTS this month will help dispel any dark clouds in your life, so you can experience a new level of joy and victory. See **page 28** for details.



"Jesus saw their faith."

— MARK 2:5

Can Jesus See YOUR Faith?

Many people have a serious misconception about the nature of true faith. They assume it's just an unseen, mystical force that no one can see or evaluate.

But the Bible says otherwise...

One day a paralyzed man was carried to Jesus by four loyal friends. Not only did these friends carry the man to the house where the Lord was teaching, but they also had to cut a hole in the roof because of the crowd blocking the doorway.

Jesus was clearly impressed by this display of sacrificial love! Mark 2:5 says He "*saw their faith.*"

In the same way, God sees your faith today. Every prayer...every act of kindness...every sacrificial seed for souls—nothing goes unnoticed.

Through your monthly financial seeds sown into God's Kingdom, you are bringing lost people to the feet of Jesus!

As an Inspiration Ministries Monthly Partner, you have recognized the truth of Proverbs 11:30: "*He who wins souls is wise.*" You realize that just as a soul is precious to Jesus, it should also be precious to us as His followers. By partnering with Inspiration Ministries on a monthly basis, you and other partners are helping to bring over 100,000 people every month to Jesus as their Lord and Savior!

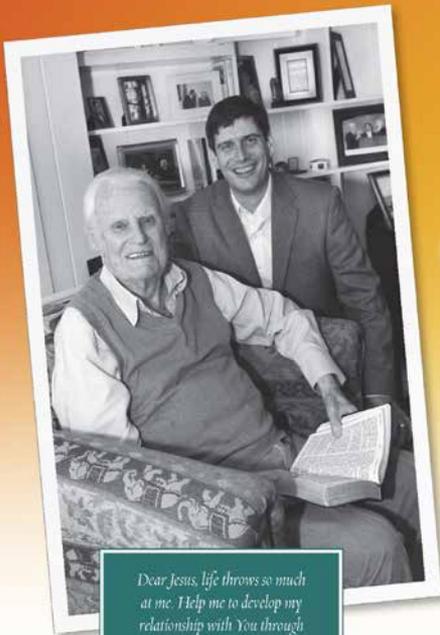
Let Jesus see your faith today!

By calling one of the numbers below, you can *automatically* be a soul-winner and help to fulfill the Great Commission every month. ❖

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Dear Jesus, life throws so much at me. Help me to develop my relationship with You through prayer and study. I pray for Your blessing as I make my time with You a priority. In Jesus' name. Amen.

What Would **BILLY GRAHAM** Have Done Differently?

**Will Graham
was shocked at his
grandfather's advice!**

“Pray. Pray. Pray,” my grandfather said to me, sitting in front of the fireplace in the log home that he and my grandmother built from the ground up in the 1950s. He added, “Study. Study. Study.”

He whispered, “Looking back, I wish I had done so much more of both.”

I had come to visit him for advice and guidance. I had just been called away from my church to serve with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, and I knew this wouldn't be an easy task. I'd be gone from home—from my wife and children—for weeks at a time. I'd be traveling to difficult and spiritually dark places around the world.

After first seeking my Heavenly Father through prayer, it made sense to next consult the man who had drawn the blueprint—who had traveled farther and spoken to more people than any other evangelist in human history—my grandfather.

I'll admit that I was expecting a different kind of advice: key verses to use in sermons, hand gestures to drive home a point, or tips on how to invite people to come forward to make a decision for Christ.

Instead, my grandfather's response left me pondering. After all, nearly every time I visited him, he was doing one of two things—praying or reading God's Word. He constantly devoted his time to prayer and study. How could it be that he felt inadequate in these areas?

Perhaps sensing my question, my grandfather explained.

“I wish I knew the Bible as well as your grandmother. She knows it better than anyone I have ever met,” he quietly continued. “And we could have done so much more if we had taken fewer speaking engagements and spent more time on our knees in earnest prayer.”

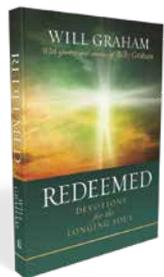
And that was it. That was the advice I had sought, and it is guidance that I have carried with me ever since as I've traveled the globe

and proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ. Not a day goes by when I don't hear my grandfather whisper those words.

Whatever walk of life you are in, I hope that you can hear my grandfather's instruction and take it to heart as well. You see, you don't have to be an evangelist or a minister to gain incredible, eternal value from time spent in prayer and study. You will be blessed beyond measure as you develop your relationship with God in this way.

Further, it is wise to be careful about doing too much. We can get so busy that our efforts begin to crowd out our relationship with God. Even if what we are doing is noble and productive, we can't let it get in the way of what is most important in the scope of eternity.

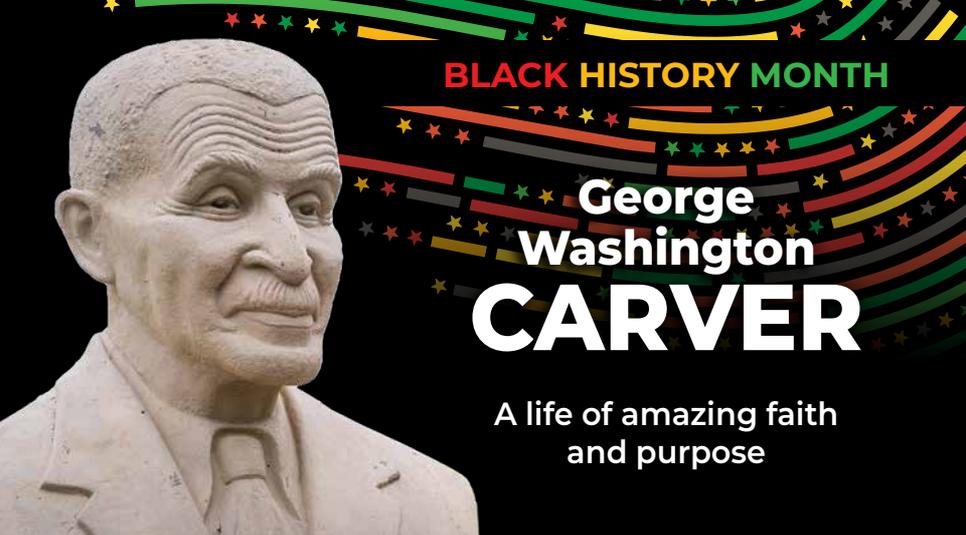
My friends, take heed of the lesson my grandfather learned in his life and ministry and passed along to me. Make prayer and studying the Bible a priority in your life today. ❖



Excerpt from *Redeemed: Devotions for the Longing Soul* by Will Graham. Copyright 2018 by William Graham. Published by Thomas Nelson, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers. Reprinted by permission.



William Franklin Graham IV (Will) is the third generation of Grahams to proclaim the Gospel under the banner of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. The grandson of Billy Graham and the oldest son of Franklin Graham, Will began his evangelistic ministry in 2006.



BLACK HISTORY MONTH

George Washington CARVER

A life of amazing faith and purpose

No one knows George Washington Carver's real birth-date, but decades after his death, he's honored around the world.

Born during the Civil War to a woman enslaved to the Carver family, George was destined for more than a life of servitude. His deep faith in the kind presence of God enabled him to not only overcome obstacles, but it also allowed him to be a world changer who impacted generations to come.

After roving marauders kidnapped George and his mother, the Carvers searched and secured his return. His mother was never found, but Mrs. Susan Carver nursed George back to health and raised him until about the age of 10. He received a basic education and spent much time in the garden and woods of the property.

George's ability to nurse sick plants back to health soon earned

him the nickname Plant Doctor. As a young child, he began a daily habit of reading the Bible and seeking wisdom from its author. He once stated, "Never have I been without this consciousness of the Creator speaking to me."

In pursuit of more education, George left the Carvers and found a world deeply divided by segregation and dangerous racism. His persevering faith guided him over every obstacle. Working for others and launching his own laundry business, he completed high school and enrolled in college. But when he arrived, the college turned him away because of his skin color.

Penniless, George found work, made friends, and began taking art classes. His art instructor persuaded him to enroll at a Christian college in Iowa to study art, and in 1893, his work was exhibited at the World Fair.

Despite his artistic success, George felt called to a life purpose of increasing "the welfare and happiness of God's people." He decided studying agriculture offered more potential for helping mankind than pursuing an art career. His dedication to God guided his life. "Jesus said one must become as a little child...he must let no laziness, no fear, no stubbornness keep him from his duty. My work, my life must be in the spirit of a little child seeking only to know the truth and follow it."

In his eyes, the desires of the world ran contrary to the desires of a good God. So George aimed to be the link for bridging that chasm. He lived with "one hand in the hand of a fellow man in need and the other hand in Christ" believing God would fill the vacuum with goodness.

"As I worked on projects which fulfilled a real human need, forces were working through me which amazed me. I would often go to sleep with an apparently insoluble problem. When I woke, the answer was there."

George's legendary knowledge of agriculture and nutrition continues to improve lives today, and his example of Christian living offers hope for every generation.

George Washington Carver rose above every unfair, unjust, unreasonable difficulty by trusting in the personal presence of his loving Savior. With his life rooted in the love of God, hate neither stopped him nor drove him. The epitaph on his gravestone reveals the key to the legacy of love he left for others:

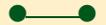
"He could have added fortune to fame, but caring for neither, he found happiness and honor in being helpful to the world." ❖

George Washington Carver Fascinating Facts

Iowa State University's first African-American student



Advisor to Mahatma Gandhi



Accomplished artist and musician



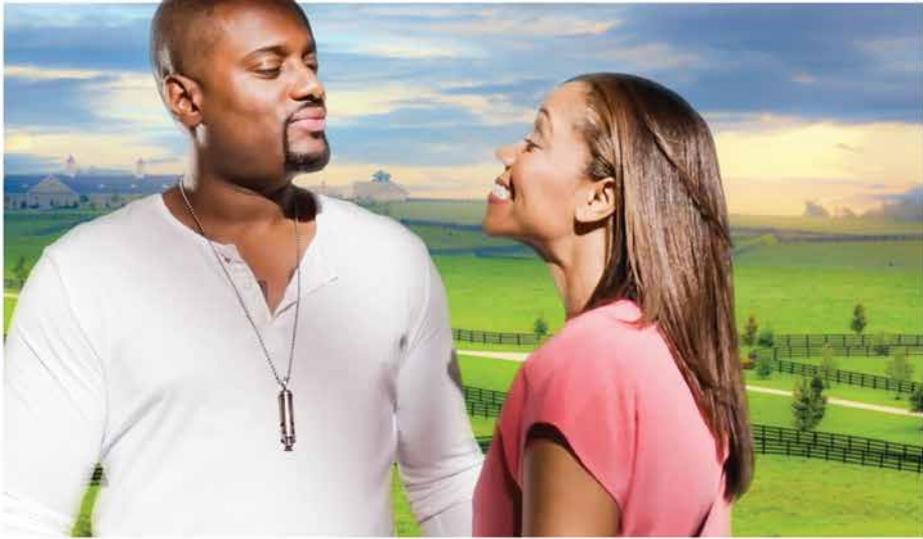
Helped Henry Ford manufacture peanut rubber during WWII



Developed the concept of rotational planting



STEPS OF FAITH



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In this lighthearted drama, Faith finds herself facing challenges—and love—when God sends her to a horse farm to help children. Stars Charles Malik Whitfield and Chrystee Pharris.

Tuesday, February 14 at 9:00 p.m. ET

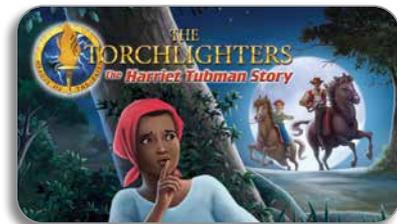
BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Experience God's **JOY**



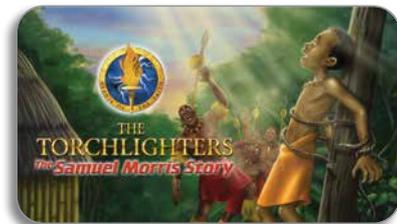
Saturday, February 11 at 3:00 p.m. ET

Miracles in Action
Journey with Angela Alexander through heart-wrenching grief to the peace that passes understanding. A must-see for anyone who's questioned whether God still performs miracles!



Saturday, February 25 at 3:00 p.m. ET

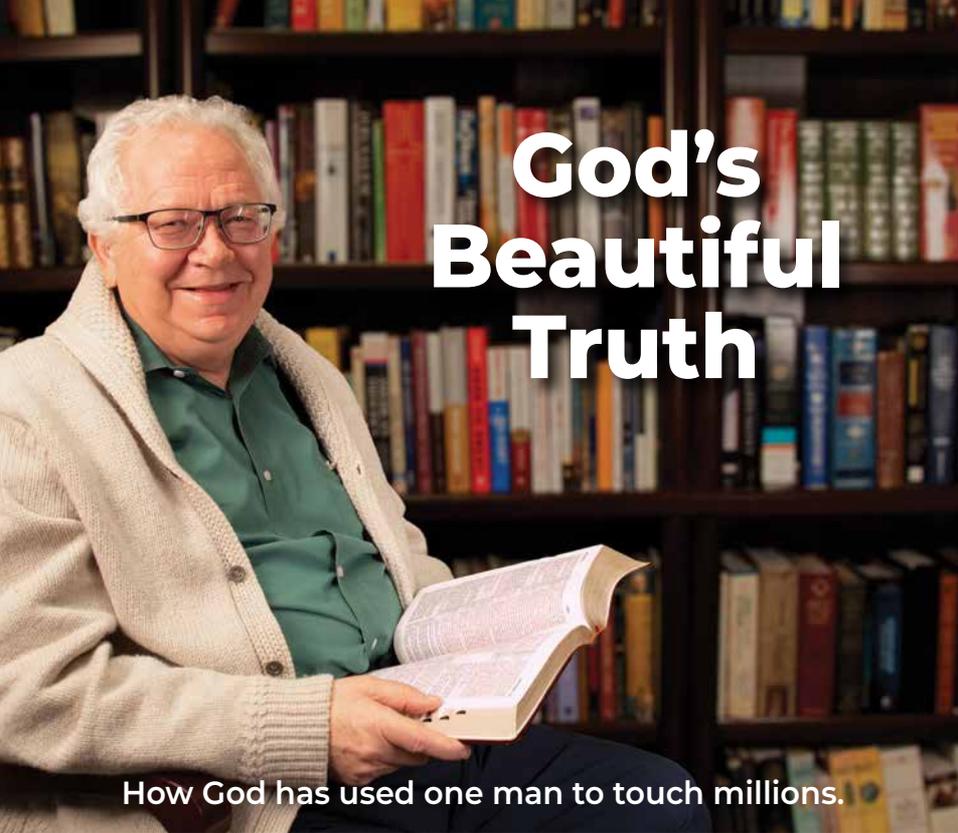
The Torchlighters: The Harriet Tubman Story
Harriet Tubman rose from slavery to become the Moses of her time. Discover how Harriet's faith in Jesus enabled her to rescue hundreds of others from oppression.



Saturday, February 25 at 3:30 p.m. ET

The Torchlighters: The Samuel Morris Story
Samuel Morris moved from Liberia to America to become a missionary. Even though he died very young, his faithfulness inspired many others to become missionaries as well.

Watch life-changing, Christian programming 24/7 from Inspiration TV worldwide on all your favorite devices and streaming tools. Go to inspiration.org/tv, or check out our FREE Inspiration TV app on your smart phone, tablet, or computer.



God's Beautiful Truth

How God has used one man to touch millions.

If you've read *INSPIRATION MAGAZINE* over the years, then you've probably enjoyed the insight of our daily devotions. For over 20 years, God has used these nuggets of truth to grow the faith of people around the world.

Today we want to introduce you to their author, John Roos, a man with deep spiritual roots and a yearning for truth. He describes his devotions as revelations coming directly and personally from his loving Father.

"I try to share what I feel God is doing in my life," John explains. "Every devotion comes from

things I feel He is teaching me."

John's journey to faith began with a rich, godly heritage: a great-grandfather who came to America to be a circuit-riding preacher, a grandfather whose vibrant faith tethered John to truth, a preaching father, a godly mother, and decades of deep, faith-based friendships. But all of that is only part of the story.

John had to navigate some rough patches in his life before he came to his own faith in Jesus. Believing Christianity was a sham, he turned his back on Christ as a young adult and often challenged the faith of believers he perceived

as shallow and hypocritical.

The sovereign Creator never flinched, however. He just kept calling John to draw closer and discover truth, using the desires of John's own heart to reveal God's presence.

Initially, God worked through John's love of philosophy. Works such as Wittgenstein's exposition "The Limits of Language" began to thaw his heart and helped him realize the transitory nature of words. He soon gave his soul to Jesus and dedicated his life to seeking the God who never changes.

A short time later, he met Gail, a woman of amazing spiritual understanding. Both realized they were made for each other. They were married, and from that point on, they committed themselves to passionately pursuing God's wisdom and truth.

"I began to realize most people repeated what they heard about the Bible instead of reading it for themselves. For me, reading the Bible was interactive and addictive. God kept giving me fresh insights that were not from me."

One day, John clearly heard God telling him, "Write!" As a marketing specialist, the mandate made sense, but he had no idea *what* he should write. John obeyed and began filling volumes with all God revealed to him. It would be years before anyone knew about his writing or what God had put in his heart.

Wanting to serve the Lord, John expected to enter the pastorate like his earthly father, but his Heavenly Father consistently shut those doors. As he continued to seek God through the fundamentals of faith, he began to understand and communicate scriptural truth through his interests in music and history. "I began to understand that God helped me see and communicate scriptural truth in unique ways through my interests such as music and history."

As he and Gail prayed and studied the Word, they faithfully followed God's leading in all aspects of their lives. Eventually God led John to Inspiration Ministries to work in the marketing department; however, God's plans didn't stop there.

During a strategy meeting, David Cerullo expressed a desire to offer partners daily devotions. Before he could stop himself, John felt prompted by the Spirit to say, "That would be a slam dunk. I've already written thousands." In an instant, the platform God had planned for John's writing came into view.

John's obedience to the one-word instruction, "Write," has resulted in over 8,000 devotions that have since touched the lives of millions. Since the beginning, John has seen his devotional writing as his service from God and to God. We invite you to join us as we celebrate his legacy! ❖

What Is Your LEGACY?

Look throughout the Bible, and you'll see example after example of both good and bad legacies.

Take Adam and Eve for instance. There isn't a better example of a legacy of sin, sickness, and death. But turn to the New Testament, and you'll see a different story altogether. Jesus left a legacy of love, joy, and peace by dying on the cross and canceling the curse that stood against us (Galatians 3:13-14).

The writer of Hebrews compares Jesus' legacy to a Will that takes effect when a person dies (Hebrews 9:16-17). Jesus' Last Will and Testament cancels out the old inheritance of sin and offers Christ's life in exchange!

When you live in Jesus' legacy of favor and blessing, you can extend it to others in this lifetime—and into the future with a Will and Estate Plan. Many dread making such a plan, but the Inspiration Ministries' Estate Planning Advisors can help. Let us show you how to:

- Save on taxes now
- Provide for your loved ones after you're gone
- Continue your soul-winning legacy



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Convincing Proofs

BIBLE READING: ACTS 1

Johann Carl Friedrich Gauss, born in 1777, made many important contributions to mathematics. But perhaps his greatest contribution was insisting that results needed to be *tested*. He insisted that mathematical solutions pass *every* test. Statements must be *proven*, not taken for granted.

In similar ways, Jesus demonstrated that it was important to *prove* the validity of our faith. He demonstrated that He was the Son of God and that His teachings were true.

We see this when John the Baptist sent disciples to question Jesus, asking if He was “*the Coming One, or are we to look for someone else?*” Jesus responded by pointing to the evidence of His ministry: “*Go and report to John what you hear and see.*” They could see the results for themselves. Blind eyes were opened. The lame could walk. Lepers were cleansed. The deaf could hear. The dead were raised. And the Gospel was being preached (Matthew 11:1-5).

His followers, too, were to *prove* the Gospel by letting their light shine so that others could see their “*good works*” (Matthew 5:16).

After Jesus' resurrection, He responded to Thomas's doubt by appearing to him and *proving* that He was alive (John 20:24-29). This was one of His “*many convincing proofs.*”

Today, the world still looks for valid *proof* that the Gospel is true. Remember, people are watching you. Seek to live so that your life provides proof that you are passing the tests.

How are you shining the light of the Gospel to those around you?

WEDNESDAY

February

1

To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

Acts 1:3 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for changing my life. Use me to demonstrate the power of the Gospel. May others see Jesus in me. In Jesus' name, amen.

These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

Acts 1:14

Agreement in Prayer

BIBLE READING: ACTS 1

After Jesus ascended into Heaven, the disciples had many concerns. An entrenched religious establishment dominated the culture around them, and Rome provided strict political and military controls. What was this small group of believers to do?

Faced with these uncertainties, they turned to prayer. But this was not casual, informal prayer. They prayed *constantly*. This was *persistent* prayer. They prayed for wisdom. For breakthroughs and God's direction.

Their hearts and minds were united. There was no rivalry or competition. People throughout the community participated. Both men and women prayed. People from every background prayed.

In the days that followed this season of prayer, the world was turned upside down. The Holy Spirit fell. Miracles took place. Thousands were saved. The church was born, and the Gospel was taken throughout the world.

We can feel a sense of despair and hopelessness. Our challenges can seem overwhelming. But the Bible reminds us that God has not changed. We have access to the same Holy Spirit that changed the first-century world. We have the same opportunity to pray and seek God for our needs.

Today as you face uncertainties and problems, you too can turn to prayer. As much as possible, pray *“with one accord”* with other believers. Be bold, praying in faith. A watch to see how God answers your prayers.

Compose a prayer for unity with other believers.

Bewildered and Amazed

BIBLE READING: ACTS 2

Jesus promised that when the Spirit came, His disciples would receive power (Acts 1:8). But no one knew what to expect. Then when the Spirit fell on the day of Pentecost, everything changed. Ordinary people could do *extraordinary* things.

Observing these events were *“devout men”* (v. 5) who were serious about their faith. Many were students of the Scriptures. They found their vocabulary inadequate to describe the outpouring of the Spirit.

First, they were *“bewildered.”* The Greek word suggests they were *perplexed*. Second, they were *“amazed.”* The Greek word here indicates that they were *astounded*. What they saw defied belief. Third, they were *“astonished.”* The Greek word expresses a sense of *wonder*. They *marveled* at what was taking place.

These godly people knew about miracles. But what they were seeing was new. They were *perplexed*. *Overwhelmed*.

They saw the work of the Holy Spirit. They discovered that with the Holy Spirit, *nothing* is impossible. *All limits* are removed. Amazing things can happen.

This is a reminder of what the Spirit can do today! He is ready to amaze, astonish, fill you with wonder, shatter your preconceived ideas, stretch your imagination, break every boundary, and give you a new understanding.

Open your heart and mind to the Spirit. Remove your limits.

Where do you most need a touch from the Holy Spirit right now?

When this sound occurred, the crowd came together and they were bewildered, because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. They were amazed and astonished.

Acts 2:6–7 NASB

PRAYER:

Holy Spirit, fall on me in a fresh way. Open my eyes to more of Your truth. With You anything is possible! In Jesus' name, amen.

The beginning of wisdom is: Acquire wisdom; and with all your possessions, acquire understanding.

Proverbs 4:7 NASB

Biblical Principles

BIBLE READING: PROVERBS 4

On December 17, 1903, after years of experimenting, Wilbur and Orville Wright flew in their plane, the *Flyer*. Their first flight lasted just 12 seconds, covering 120 feet. They flew three more flights that day, the longest lasting 59 seconds, covering 852 feet.

While the brothers knew what they had achieved, many others failed to grasp the implications.

Most people in their hometown of Dayton, Ohio, doubted the flight had taken place. An editor commented, “Fifty-nine seconds? If it had been 59 minutes, then it might have been a news item.” Photographs were received with indifference or skepticism. A Paris newspaper concluded that the whole thing was a “fabrication.”

Skeptics did not realize that the brothers had discovered the *basic principles* of flying. They had *proven* that flying was possible. Soon their discoveries would revolutionize transportation, leading to vast changes throughout society.

Learning fundamental principles is critical to success in every endeavor. In our spiritual lives, learning biblical principles leads to breakthroughs. They teach us how to receive God’s blessings and favor. He can multiply our efforts and give us innovative ideas. He can help us see the world in new ways and solve problems.

The Bible urges us to remember the importance of learning God’s principles. Seek His wisdom. Base your life on the Bible. Ask Him to reveal more of His wisdom to you.

How are you actively seeking to discover more of God's principles?

Meeting Needs

BIBLE READING: ACTS 3

A recent analysis revealed that more than 175,000 new brands were introduced in the US alone in a period of a few years. Of these, only a small number survived. And even fewer thrived. What made the difference? Why did some succeed while most failed?

Intrigued by these questions, researchers studied thousands of brands. The *most important factor* in long-term success was “meeting unmet needs.” This meant providing products and services that people *needed*, solving problems, and improving lives.

This principle applies to our Christian lives as well. What does it take for us to impact the world? We need to stand out when there are so many competing beliefs. Many don’t recognize the need for the Gospel and doubt the Christian faith. Many don’t believe its promises and that it can change lives.

Meeting needs was one reason for the explosive growth of the Gospel. We see this in action when Peter and John confronted a man who had been lame his whole life. His need? To walk. Peter demonstrated that God’s power could *meet his need*.

Remember, people all around you have problems—big and small, financial and emotional, relational and personal. Ask God to help you demonstrate that He is the answer to every problem. He can provide everything they need. He can give them meaning and purpose. He can meet physical and emotional needs and bless relationships.

What is your biggest area of need right now?

I do not have silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, walk!

Act 3:6 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I commit these needs to You: _____. Thank You for meeting every need! Use me to impact others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

As they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.

Acts 4:13 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, all wisdom and power come from You. I submit my life to You. Use me to impact lives for Your Kingdom. In Jesus' name, amen.

Describe your current relationship with Jesus.

Qualifications

BIBLE READING: ACTS 4

Watching and listening to Peter and John, the Jewish rulers viewed them as “*uneducated*” men without special abilities. The Greek word, used here for the only time in the Bible, indicates that they had received no official instruction. They even were considered *illiterate*.

They also were “*untrained*.” The Greek word here is the source of our English word idiot. As this indicates, these rulers did not consider them to be intelligent or qualified to be leaders.

Yet how could these observers explain the amazing things these men had done? They had preached with boldness and healed the sick. The one thing that stood out was that they had “*been with Jesus*.” They *had* whatever He had.

In our time, many develop stereotypes about who can be used by God. Some assume He only uses people with impressive resumes—the intelligent, the beautiful, and the successful.

But the example of Peter and John reminds us that *God can use anyone*—young or old, educated or illiterate, rich or poor. But we *cannot* do this in our own strength. We need the power of the *Holy Spirit*, drawing on our personal relationship with Jesus.

Do you want to be used by God? *Deepen* your personal *relationship* with Jesus. Learn from Him. Study His Word. Be filled with the Spirit. Seek to be led by the Spirit. Let Him guide you. Be confident in Him. Be ready to walk by faith.

First-Hand Experience

BIBLE READING: ACTS 4

People throughout Jerusalem had witnessed the impact of the ministry of Peter and John. The sick had been healed. Lives had been changed. The Gospel message was being proclaimed.

Concerned, the religious leaders called Peter and John to appear before them to explain what they had done and defend their actions. They were asked by what power or in whose name had they done these things.

These apostles could have discussed ideas, presented theories, or argued from the perspective of history. Instead, they pointed to their own, vivid, *first-hand experience*. They said things they knew were true because they had seen and heard them themselves.

The Bible consistently makes it clear that effective ministry is based on this kind of first-hand experience when our lives have been changed. Other people can tell the difference between genuine faith, born of experience, and what is shallow and superficial. There's a difference between repeating what others have said and speaking about things you “*have seen and heard*.”

Do not be content with a second-hand experience of God's power or a superficial understanding of the Bible. Study His Word. Seek to deepen your relationship with God. Spend time in prayer. Apply His principles.

When you talk to others, share the things that you *personally* know are true—the truths you have experienced. Let them know what God has done for you!

What is one spiritual experience you can share with others?

Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”

Acts 4:19–20

PRAYER:

Father, open doors, so I can share with others all You have done in my life. Please give me a deeper revelation of Your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.

Grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word [...] they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

Acts 4:29, 31 NKJV

PRAYER:

Father, I commit these issues to You: _____
 Nothing is impossible with You. Give me boldness and faith. I trust You. In Jesus' name, amen.

What bold breakthrough are you praying for today?

Bold Prayer

BIBLE READING: ACTS 4

John Knox lived in turbulent times. Born in 1514 in Scotland, he was a tutor before being called to the Protestant ministry. In 1553 Knox was forced to flee to France because of political machinations. When he returned to Scotland in 1559, Knox became an outspoken critic of the regime of Mary, Queen of Scots. The conflict between Mary and Knox came to a head in a dramatic encounter in September 1560.

Mary once admitted that she feared “the prayers of John Knox more than all the assembled armies of Europe.” Why such fear? Because she knew that his prayers were *powerful* and *made a difference*. He was bold because he was *confident* in his relationship with God. About Knox, one English politician said, “He put more life in us than 500 trumpets blustering in our ears.”

Knox is known to have prayed, “O Lord, give me Scotland, or I die!” He consistently repeated this audacious prayer. As a result of his prayers, spiritual things happened. Knox knew that *nothing* was impossible for those who pray. He stated confidently that “a man with God is always in the majority.”

Today, God hasn't changed. He looks for people with the boldness that characterized the prayer life of John Knox. Determine to be a person of faith. Believe God *boldly*. Pray with *confidence* and faith. Know for certain that with Him *nothing* is impossible!

The Whole Message

BIBLE READING: ACTS 5

The apostles were performing “*Many signs and wonders*” (v. 12). The faith among the Christian community was so great that people “*even carried the sick out into the streets*” on cots and pallets so Peter’s “*shadow might fall on any of them*” (v. 15). People throughout the area came to Jerusalem, and “*they were all being healed*” (vs. 16).

The religious leaders were jealous. Determined to curtail the spread of the Gospel, they put the apostles in prison. But God sent an angel at night to open the prison gates and lead them out (vs. 17–20).

The angel gave them this direction: They were to continue spreading the Gospel, declaring the same message they had proclaimed before they were arrested.

This was “*the whole message of this life*.” It was about the way people lived, every part of their lives. The angel specifically wanted them to declare not just aspects of the message but “*the whole message*” without compromise.

That is the same message that applies today. Some try to reduce the message to doing good deeds and having nice thoughts. But our message is for everyone. It's a message about every part of life.

Don't limit God. Remember, the Gospel impacts every part of life. Dedicate yourself to this whole message of healing, forgiveness, salvation, wisdom, power, authority, changed lives, and eternal life. *Everything!*

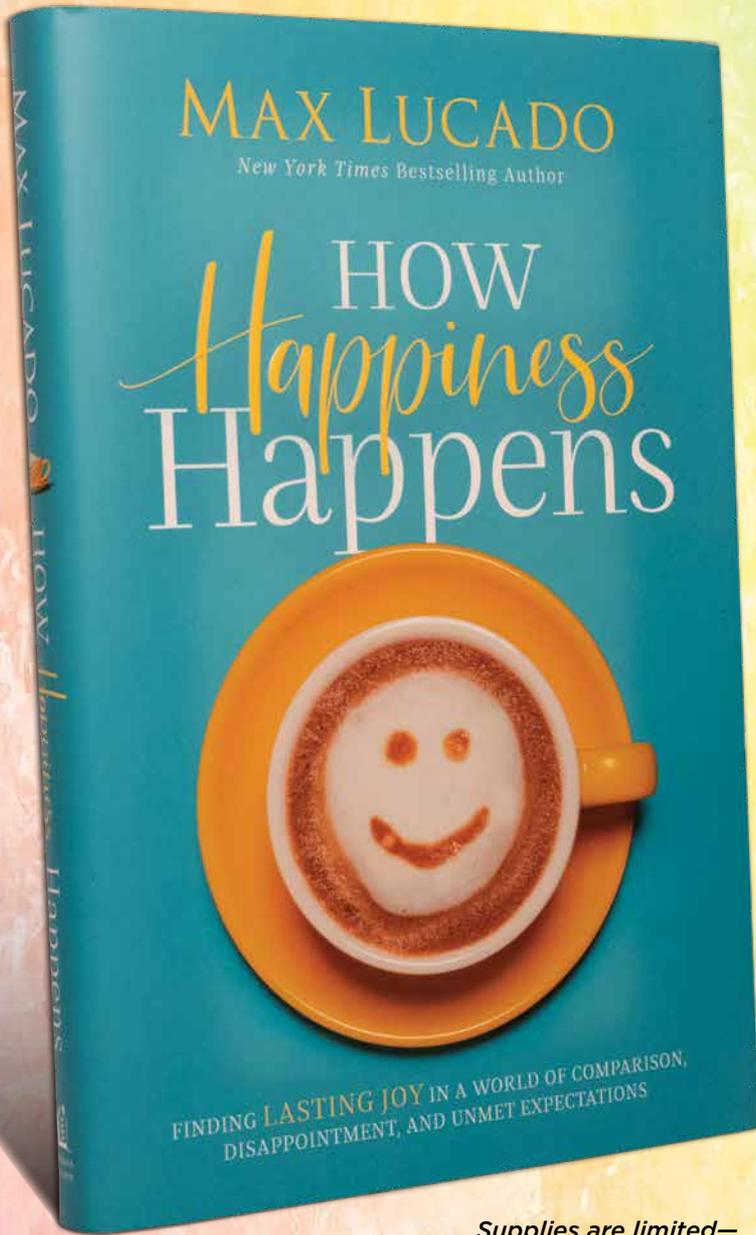
Have you been tempted to leave out parts of the Gospel message?

Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple area the whole message of this life.

Acts 5:20 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, the whole Gospel is true. Help me be Your messenger in spreading this whole message. In Jesus' name, amen.



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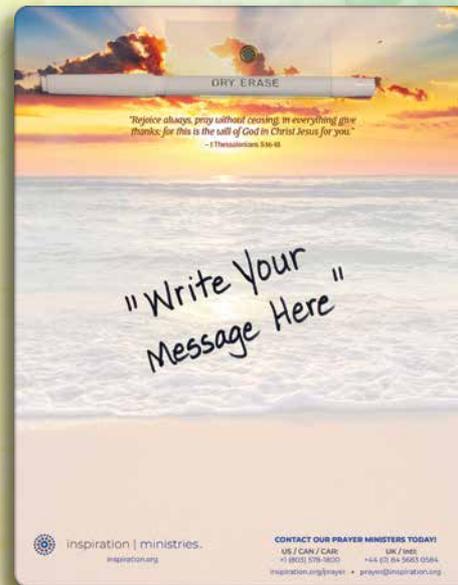


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When Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

Acts 8:18–19 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, help me to have the right priorities. I surrender my whole life to serving You. In Jesus' name, amen.

What has been the result when you've tried shortcuts?

Cure-All

BIBLE READING: ACTS 8

Throughout history, many have searched for instant solutions—pills, remedies, and treatments. One solution was the plant known as *panax ginseng*. Found in several areas throughout Asia, this plant was thought to provide instant cures for many ailments. Biologist Carl Linnaeus named the genus *panax* because this word is Greek for all healing. This is the source of the English word *panacea*, meaning a remedy for all ills or difficulties.

People throughout the centuries have looked for various *panaceas*. This was the motive of many people during Jesus' ministry. They were more interested in meeting their immediate physical needs than serving God or the Gospel.

Jesus wanted them to focus on "*the food that lasts for eternal life*" (John 6:27). Instead of just thinking about temporary solutions, think about *eternal* things. Focus on serving God and seeking first His Kingdom.

Simon, who previously had practiced magic, seemed interested in the Gospel, but revealed his true character when he saw the display of the Spirit's power. Then, when Simon tried to buy this power, Peter knew his heart wasn't right (Acts 8:9–24).

God can meet our needs in many ways. But it is important to have the right priorities. Remember that He is interested in our hearts. We must genuinely commit our lives to follow Jesus. He must be our Lord. We must leave everything else to follow Him.

Witnessing for Christ

BIBLE READING: ACTS 8

As a boy, Frumentius was taken by his uncle for a sea voyage. Their ship stopped at a harbor on the Red Sea. There, the ship was attacked; the only survivors were Frumentius and his brother. The two boys were taken as slaves to the King of Aksum (in modern Ethiopia).

It would have been easy for these boys to disappear into obscurity. But Frumentius became a bold witness for Christ, impacting people throughout Ethiopia with his character and faith. Gaining respect, Frumentius eventually became part of the national government.

After the king's death, both brothers were given their freedom. But Frumentius decided to stay in Ethiopia. He helped educate the son of the queen and administer the kingdom.

He rose to the position of the first bishop of Aksum, steering the church through the difficult theological waters. He is credited with the first Ethiopian translation of the New Testament. He used his influence to spread Christianity and encouraged Christians to be open about their faith.

When he was taken into slavery, it would have been easy for Frumentius to become discouraged and give up hope. But instead, he continued to serve God and live for Christ. As a result, he helped change the world.

Remember, God can use you in any situation. Look for opportunities to share the Gospel. Seek to serve Him. Be a bold witness for the Gospel.

In what difficult situation can you display the light of the Gospel?

Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.

Acts 8:35 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, open my eyes to ways I can impact lives for Christ. Help me to be a blessing to others. In Jesus' name, amen.

Trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas; and after he brought them out, he said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

Acts 16:29–30 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, these people need salvation: _____ . Open their eyes that they might see. Bring salvation to them and their households. In Jesus’ name, amen.

How are you sharing the Gospel with those around you?

Saved!

BIBLE READING: ACTS 16

Cotton Mather, born on this day in 1663, and his family were influential in the early days of the American colonies. His grandfather Richard Mather immigrated to America after a distinguished career as a minister in England. Richard’s son Increase was an influential Congregational minister, author, educator, and councilman.

Cotton followed in their footsteps, in many ways surpassing them in impact. He wrote more than 400 books on subjects ranging from theology to science. Summarizing his influence, George Washington once called him the Father of the Founding Fathers.

Mather had a passionate commitment to the Bible and bringing salvation to the lost. One of his most memorable sermons was, “What Must I Do to Be Saved?” As he made clear, there was no “more weighty question.”

He wanted *everyone* to know they *can be saved!* But there is *only one way* to salvation: through Jesus (John 14:6). All of us will face God and give account of our lives. Knowing this day is coming, he cried, “Oh! Be persuaded!”

Mather reminds us that to experience real change, we must repent for our mistakes. Following the example set by the Philippian jailer, we must confess our sins and trust in Jesus.

Millions around the world need to hear this message of salvation. Like Cotton Mather, commit yourself to live according to God’s Word. Ask Him to give you a passion for souls.

God’s Chosen Vessel

BIBLE READING: ACTS 9

To the early church, Saul was feared, the man who previously tormented followers of Jesus. People in Damascus were concerned after learning he planned to visit, armed with authority from the chief priests to bind all who called on Jesus’ name. They didn’t know that Jesus Himself had appeared to Saul. In that moment, Saul became Paul—a committed disciple of Jesus.

God told one of His servants Ananias to go pray for Paul. Knowing Paul’s reputation, Ananias resisted. God explained that Paul wasn’t the man whom believers feared but a person whom God *selected* for a special ministry. He was “*a chosen vessel.*”

The story of Paul and his conversion reminds us that each of us is special to God. As we look at our lives, we may see mistakes and weaknesses. But we need to realize that each person is *unique* with a special journey and unique preparation.

When God looks at us, He sees people specially *chosen* and prepared for tasks. Each of us has been given special gifts and prepared in special ways, ready for the unique work for which we were chosen.

Today, realize that you are special to God. He has chosen you to accomplish special things for His kingdom. Commit your way to Him and seek to be faithful in the tasks you have been given. Remember, He loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.

What gifts can you use to share the Good News?

Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.

Acts 9:15 NKJV

PRAYER:

Father, thank You that You have chosen me. Thank You for the gifts and opportunities You have given me. Help me to fulfill Your calling for me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him.

Acts 10:34–35 NASB

Everything Changes

BIBLE READING: ACTS 10

Everything can change in a moment. A light bulb is turned on, and we see in new ways. We lay aside old ways and receive a *fresh* revelation.

Consider Peter. Following traditions, he had assumptions about the Gospel. Then, in a moment, his perspective changed as God gave him a *dramatic* vision.

Although “*greatly perplexed*” about the meaning of the vision, he was *open* when the Spirit spoke to him (v. 17). He was willing to go with the Gentiles who arrived at his door. He watched as the Spirit sovereignly fell on these men after Peter had shared the Gospel.

Observing these events with amazement, Peter realized that the Gospel was for everyone and ordered that these men be baptized. Because he listened and was available, Peter received an unexpected revelation that changed his life and the world.

These patterns apply to each of us. We should seek to be humble before God, open for Him to reveal new truths, ready for new insights, hungry for God, and digging into His Word eagerly. Listen for His voice. Be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit, always teachable. Always remember that the understanding of even the most intelligent person is only *partial*.

Like Peter, develop a vital relationship with God. Stay available for His leading, ready to respond as He leads. Ask God to open your eyes to help you see in new ways.

PRAYER:

Father, speak to me. Help me be ready to hear from You. Open my mind and heart to receive fresh revelation. In Jesus’ name, amen.

How can you actively be open to the teaching of the Holy Spirit?

Healing The Oppressed

BIBLE READING: ACTS 10

In a vision, God revealed to Peter that he would be visited by Gentiles, which turned out to be colleagues of a devout centurion named Cornelius. They wanted Peter to accompany them. Based on traditional views, Peter might have rejected the invitation, but God directed him to go.

As he stood before these Gentiles, Peter summarized the Gospel by indicating that God had anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good. Jesus was able to heal all who were oppressed by the devil—not *some* but *all!*

That same Jesus is still on the throne. He has made available to believers today that same Holy Spirit. And that same power is available to heal, deliver, and do good. That same power is available to you.

Do you feel oppressed by health issues? Financial problems? Fears and doubts? Confusion? Relationships? You can be free of all oppression by the power of Jesus’ name.

Don’t allow the devil or the world to rob you of the victory God has prepared. Commit your needs to Him with a heart filled with faith. Stand on His promises. God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power. That same Spirit—that same power—is available to you!

Right now, the Bible tells us that He is ready to meet your every need. Call on Him. Believe Him for victory!

In what areas of your life do you need the anointing of the Holy Spirit?

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

Acts 10:38

PRAYER:

Father, here are problems I face: _____ . I believe You will give me victory in every situation. Thank You! In Jesus’ name, amen.

“The Holy Spirit told me to go with them and not to worry that they were Gentiles. [...] As I began to speak,” Peter continued, “the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as he fell on us at the beginning.

Acts 11:12, 15 NLT

PRAYER:

Father, help me be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Guide me. Help me make the right choices. I surrender my life to You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Where do you sense the Holy Spirit leading you today?

Guided by the Spirit

BIBLE READING: ACTS 11

When God poured out the Holy Spirit, He changed the nature of His relationship with His people. The Spirit was God Himself. He was available not just to a few priests or prophets but to *everyone*, including Gentiles.

This was a radical concept for the early church, which was at first mostly Jewish. When they heard that the Gentiles had received the Gospel, some were concerned. Many criticized Peter for his actions. But he could only report what the Holy Spirit had said and done. How could they question the Spirit’s sovereign actions?

These disciples began to understand what Jesus had taught about the Spirit. He was like the wind, blowing wherever He pleased. *“You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes”* (John 3:8 NKJV). They realized that they could not control or limit the Spirit or anticipate what He would do. He was Sovereign God.

That same Holy Spirit is available to you right now. You cannot anticipate His work in your life, but He is with you and wants to guide you. You need to be sensitive to His leading and aware of how He guides you day by day.

Seek to be sensitive to God’s Spirit. Surrender your life to Him. He can fill you with His fruit (Galatians 5:22–23). He can give you power. He can protect and guide you and give you His wisdom.

What Seems Impossible

BIBLE READING: ACTS 12

In 1849, two missionaries claimed to have made discoveries many found *impossible* to believe.

One missionary, Johann Krapf, described seeing a mountain in East Africa (later called Mount Kenya) that was capped with snow! Around the same time, another missionary, Johannes Rebmann, discovered Mount Kilimanjaro, declaring that this mountain, too, was covered with snow.

But the Royal Geographical Society in London seriously doubted the findings. These missionaries described seeing *snow* on mountains in one of the *hottest* places on earth. To them, this seemed ridiculous. Yet what seemed impossible was, in fact, true. These mountains were capped with snow!

We can easily be governed by what we *think* seems likely, what makes sense to our minds, and is consistent with our experiences. In the process, we can limit God and find ourselves filled with *doubt*.

The early church experienced something like this when Peter was imprisoned. They prayed fervently for his release. Yet when God answered their prayers and Rhoda told them Peter was at the door, they claimed she must be out of her mind!

What *seems* impossible? Commit every situation to God. Believe Him for answers and healing. Have faith, and don’t doubt. He is the God of miracles. Trust Him.

What impossible situation are you trusting God with today?

A servant girl named Rhoda came to open it. When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the door, she ran back inside and told everyone, “Peter is standing at the door!” “You’re out of your mind!” they said.

Acts 12:13–15 NLT

PRAYER:

Father, I commit these situations to You: _____. All things are possible with You. I trust You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

Acts 13:12

Intelligence and Belief

BIBLE READING: ACTS 13

God impacts lives in many ways. Some of the hardest people to reach can be those with worldly intelligence, people who often find it hard to believe. But some are like Sergius Paulus, a Roman proconsul, an intelligent man who believed (v. 7). What made the difference?

Paulus desired to hear the Gospel for himself, calling on Barnabas and Paul to learn from them. But not everyone was pleased with his interest. A sorcerer sought to turn him “away from the faith” (v. 8). Paul dealt with this opposition by causing the sorcerer to become blind.

Witnessing God’s power at work, Paulus believed. But he also was “astonished at the teaching of the Lord.” The message of Paul and Barnabas impacted his life.

Through Paulus we see two ways God works. God often works through the written or spoken word. But God also impacts people through various demonstrations of power.

Learn from this example. Don’t limit God. Remember the many ways He can impact lives. He can minister through the written and spoken word, His Spirit, miracles, answers to prayer, supernatural healing, and demonstrations of power.

Remember, God can impact lives in many ways. Be sensitive to His Spirit. As He leads, be ready to receive or deliver a message. But never forget to pray for breakthroughs, miracles, and demonstrations of power.

PRAYER:

Father, I commit these situations to You: _____. I seek Your wisdom but also demonstrations of Your power. No matter how You work, I trust in You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

What is one tangible way God has impacted you recently?

Prayer and Praise

BIBLE READING: ACTS 16

After bringing the Gospel to Greece, Paul and Silas were imprisoned after casting a spirit out of a girl. This was a new environment for them, and they had every reason to be concerned and even afraid. But as they waited in prison, they did not complain. Instead, they *prayed* and *sang* hymns. They poured out their hearts to God in worship and praise.

While they prayed and sang, an earthquake shook “the foundations of the prison.” When the jailer learned that they had not fled after their chains fell off, he wanted to know more about their faith. He and his family were saved that night. God turned a problem into an opportunity to demonstrate His power and change the lives of many people.

You may face situations that may seem like prisons to you. You may feel trapped by a job or finances, health, family problems, or other circumstances of life. Your environment may seem hostile and foreboding. Like a prisoner, you might be tempted to complain or be afraid. You may be confused or frustrated. Instead, react like Paul and Silas.

No matter what situation you face, focus on God. Pray. Seek Him. Tell Him every detail of your needs and concerns. And spend time in praise and worship. As you seek Him with your whole heart, you can be confident He will hear you and give you the direction and answers you need.

What situations are you facing that make you feel imprisoned?

At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God... Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed.

Acts 16:25–26

PRAYER:

Father, I commit these needs to You: _____. I seek Your direction. Thank You for Your answers. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers as well were conversing with him. Some were saying, "What would this scavenger of tidbits want to say?" Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities."

Acts 17:18 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, give me the wisdom to avoid the traps in the world. Help me focus on Your Kingdom. I dedicate myself to serving You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Do you need to rebalance your priorities and focus?

Pleasure vs. Virtue

BIBLE READING: ACTS 17

At the time the New Testament was written, two schools of philosophy dominated the Greek world: Stoics and Epicureans. As a recent study of the Greeks and their world described, Epicureans believed that pleasure is the sole good. This was based on the thoughts of Epicurus, their founder, who said, "I summon you to continuous pleasures."

In many ways, the Stoics were the opposite. Founded by a man named Zeno, this philosophy believed that reason is the supreme achievement of man. Stoics sought to be "indifferent to everything but virtue and vice." They prided themselves in choosing how to feel and react, which would guard them against the changing conditions of life.

The Epicureans and Stoics in Athens were closed to the Gospel because they were fixed in their beliefs. Indeed, they called Paul a "babbling" (v. 18 NKJV).

The world still is filled with people who are closed to the Gospel. Some cannot discern truth because their lives are dedicated to pleasure. At the same time, others are blinded by human reasoning.

Make sure you are not distracted by worldly philosophies or caught up in the pleasures and passions of the flesh. Commit yourself to serving God. Fill your mind and heart with the truth from His Word, avoiding the deceptive and false ideas that dominate the world. And commit your life to following Jesus. Be guided by biblical principles.

The God You Can Know

BIBLE READING: ACTS 17

In a recent book, author Roy Abraham Varghese summarized arguments against belief in God. In particular, he described the struggles of philosopher Bertrand Russell, one of the twentieth century's most vocal atheists.

Varghese describes how Russell's daughter became a Christian but never was able to have any serious discussion with her father about God's existence. She longed to convince Russell "that [she] had found what he had been looking for." She wanted "to persuade him that the search for God does not have to be vain." But his mind was closed, and she never could break through.

She believed her father's "whole life was a search for God." She sensed that, somewhere, "in the depths of his soul, there was a space that had once been filled by God, and he never found anything else to put in it."

The apostle Paul found many like Russell in ancient Athens, where Paul proclaimed that God was real! But the miracle was that they could know God *personally*! Yes, He "made the world and everything that is in it." But He also made each of us and wants us to know that we can "find Him, though He is not far from each one of us" (v. 27).

Today, ask God to give you a greater burden for souls, so you can help lost lives find hope and salvation. Pray for breakthroughs. Pray that their eyes would be opened.

For whose salvation are you currently praying?

I also found an altar with this inscription, "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD." Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything that is in it [...] for in Him we live and move and exist.

Acts 17:23–24, 28 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for giving meaning to my life. I commit my time, talents, and treasures to You. Use me to spread the Gospel. In Jesus' name, amen.

A good name is to be more desired than great wealth; favor is better than silver and gold.

Proverbs 22:1 NASB

A Good Name

BIBLE READING: PROVERBS 22

How important is a good *reputation*? The Bible teaches that this is *more valuable* than riches! And more *desirable*. Why? Your reputation demonstrates your character, standards, and what others think of you.

Many people go through life without concern for their name. But the Bible instructs us to *desire* a good name. We can do this by serving God and living according to His Word, by being people of integrity and keeping our promises, by being reliable and trustworthy, and as Jesus said, by being faithful (Luke 16:10–12).

Think for a moment about people you respect or admire. The mere mention of their names should fill you with appreciation. You aspire to be like them. You trust them. But you react differently when hearing the name of people with a poor reputation. These are people who fail to keep their promises and whom you don't trust.

Today, you will have the opportunity to make choices that will impact how people think about *you* and how they think about Jesus and the Christian faith. Remember, you are called to seek a good name. This is more important than power and the world's riches. You represent Jesus. How you act and speak is a reflection not only on you but on Him and the whole body of Christ! This is part of your testimony.

Be careful in your choices. And desire a good name!

What action can you take this week to work toward a good name?

Be of Good Cheer

BIBLE READING: ACTS 23

On the surface, Paul seemed bold and confident. But in reality, he had human weaknesses. We see this side after he was threatened by a mob and taken into barracks occupied by Roman soldiers.

Paul must have been concerned because Jesus Himself appeared to him that night. His message? The first words Jesus spoke were that Paul should “*be of good cheer*.” The Greek word here is rooted in a word meaning *boldness* and *courage*.

The mighty apostle Paul needed to be reassured. Even though he was outnumbered with his life in peril, he was reminded that he could face circumstances without fear. He could be *bold* and even *cheerful*!

We see the impact of this message the next morning when Paul was calm and decisive with no fear or doubt. He was not discouraged.

If Paul felt discouraged and afraid, we should not be surprised when we do too. But in every situation, like Paul, we can be of good courage. Be *encouraged*!

The Bible promises that God can supply our *every* need. No matter how big the obstacles we face, He is with us. We are never alone. No matter who threatens us, we can know that “*greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world*” (1 John 4:4 NASB).

Today, remember this message: God is with you. You can be of good cheer!

How do you deal with discouragement?

The following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.”

Acts 23:11

PRAYER:

Father, I commit these situations to You: _____. Thank You for being with me. Give me confidence and boldness. Help me trust You. In Jesus' name, amen.

The high priest Ananias came down with some elders and an attorney named Tertullus, and they brought charges against Paul to the governor. After Paul had been summoned, Tertullus began accusing him.

Acts 24:1–2 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, thank You that You are with me. Give me direction and wisdom, favor, and peace. I trust You. In Jesus' name, amen.

How have you faced intimidating situations recently?

Never Alone

BIBLE READING: ACTS 24

When Paul was on trial before political and religious leaders, he found himself opposed by Tertullus. Men like Tertullus spoke both Greek and Latin and knew Roman laws and customs.

We can be sure that this orator had been trained in rhetoric to make skillful presentations before kings and governors. Tertullus was a formidable foe for Paul in this highly hostile environment. And *“the Jews also joined in the attack”* (v. 9). Yet Paul was not intimidated, and God granted him favor and success.

Jesus had warned His disciples that they would face opposition. Those who served Him would be brought *“before kings and governors on account of My name.”* But as Paul confirmed, these situations *“will lead to an opportunity for your testimony.”* His followers did not need to worry about what to say. He would give them *“wisdom which none of your adversaries will be able to oppose or refute”* (Luke 21:12–15).

Paul's experience demonstrated that Jesus' words were true. Paul did not need to worry. God gave him favor and the words to say.

The same principle is true for you. If you serve God, you do not need to feel intimidated or worry about what others might say about you. He is with you in every situation, by your side. Look for opportunities to give your testimony. Remember, God is faithful. You can depend on Him.

The Resurrection

BIBLE READING: ACTS 24

Paul was outnumbered, opposed by Jewish leaders and an articulate lawyer named Tertullus. What could he say to defend himself against such overwhelming opposition? The resurrection was so important that Paul made this central to his defense. It also was the main issue for his accusers.

Today, some critics may think belief in the resurrection is foolish. But the resurrection remains central to our Christian faith. The resurrection is important because it demonstrates that we can be victorious in every situation. Because of the resurrection, we *always* have hope, even if circumstances seem bleak.

The resurrection demonstrates convincingly that God can turn around even the most seemingly hopeless situation. It reminds us that, through Jesus, we have victory over death and can look forward to eternal life with Him!

The resurrection also is important because it represents the power of God at work. It demonstrates that He can raise the dead. This means that *nothing* is impossible for Him! If He can raise the dead, He surely can protect us, heal our diseases, provide the resources we need, and turn our defeats into victories.

What problems do you face? Are you discouraged? Anxious? Do you feel hopeless? Or are you confident in God? The Bible encourages you to trust Him in *every* situation. Walk by faith. Remember, God raised Jesus from the dead! He can solve your problems. *Nothing* is impossible for Him!

Reflect on the meaning of the resurrection in your life.

Let those who are here themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me... unless it is for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, “Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day.”

Acts 24:20–21

PRAYER:

Father, I commit these situations to You: _____. I believe You for victory. I have faith in You. In Jesus' name, amen.

When Festus had conferred with his council, he answered, "You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go."

Acts 25:12 NASB

Worldly Power

BIBLE READING: ACTS 25

Porcius Festus had a relatively undistinguished career. He reigned as Roman governor in Judea for less than two years before dying while in office.

Paul's situation was among the first cases he faced as governor. Jewish leaders lobbied for Paul to be brought to Jerusalem, hoping to ambush him. But Festus wanted to hear Paul in person. After defending himself, Paul appealed to Caesar. Festus has no choice but to grant this request.

When King Agrippa II and his wife arrived in Caesarea, he asked to hear Paul in person. As Paul presented his case, Festus interrupted him, declaring that Paul was "out of [his] mind! [His] great learning [was] driving [him] insane" (Acts 26:24). After a discussion, Festus and Agrippa agreed that Paul could have been freed if he had not appealed to Caesar.

Festus thought like a politician, concerned with his power and reputation. But Paul knew that God "has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise" (1 Corinthians 1:27). He was not interested in wealth or political power but in completing his mission, taking the Gospel to Rome.

People like Festus come and go. They achieve power and gain wealth for a season. But eventually, those things fade. But those, like Paul, who focus on serving God, receive rewards that cannot fade.

Follow Paul's example. Focus on serving God. Trust Him to reward you.

What is God calling you to focus on and do for Him?

The Day You Met Jesus

BIBLE READING: ACTS 26

As he spoke to King Agrippa, Paul perfectly remembered the moment he met Jesus, and every word he heard, even though it had taken place many years earlier. He had told his testimony before, but his enthusiasm for the story never seemed to wane.

He described how Jesus called him by his given name, "Saul, Saul" (v. 14). He described how Jesus spoke to him, identifying Himself: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting" (v. 15).

He remembered how Jesus described the mission to which he had been called. Paul had been appointed to be a minister and "a witness not only to the things in which you have seen Me, but also to the things in which I will appear to you" (v. 16).

Jesus told Paul he was being sent to Jews and Gentiles. He was called "to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God." He was to tell them how they could "receive forgiveness of sins" (v. 18). A special inheritance had been prepared for them.

Can you remember the day you met Jesus? The day He changed your life? Today, think about what He has done for you and His call on your life. Be ready to share that testimony with others. Do not hold back, but be ready to share from your heart about Jesus and what He means to you.

Write about the day you met Jesus and the changes in your life since.

I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who were journeying with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice.

Acts 26:13-14 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for sending Jesus to die for me. Thank You that He changed me. I dedicate myself to You. May I please You with my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

The brothers and sisters there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these people Paul thanked God and was encouraged.

Acts 28:15 NIV

PRAYER:

Father, I pray for these people: _____. Bless and encourage them. Give me opportunities to minister to others in Your name. In Jesus' name, amen.

How can you practically encourage someone this week?

Encouragement

BIBLE READING: ACTS 28

Paul had been through enormous difficulties. He had faced angry mobs and debated skeptical politicians. He had been arrested and imprisoned. He had been beaten and tortured. On his journey to Rome, his ship had been destroyed, and he barely escaped.

Through all these experiences, he was a rock of stability, sure of God's presence and his calling. People looked to him for teaching and instruction and to be an example of Christlike living.

When he arrived in Italy, some Christians traveled to meet Paul and his companions. Paul reacted by thanking God. He recognized that, through them, God supplied what he needed. He was so *grateful*.

But Paul also *"was encouraged."* As a result of seeing these believers, he was strengthened. The Greek word indicates they helped *cheer him up*. Even this man who had been such a tower of faith and a powerful ambassador for the Gospel needed encouragement.

Paul knew how important this was. His letters are filled with instructions to encourage others. The Bible also instructs us to encourage each other (Hebrews 3:13).

Think about people in your life who need to be encouraged—pastors and teachers, coworkers and employers, parents and missionaries, friends and family members. Never underestimate the importance of encouragement. Look for opportunities to encourage others. Seek to be an encourager.



by Ben Cerullo

EXERCISE Your Faith

Joyful living requires
spiritual fitness.

GET HONEST

God cares about our doubts and struggles, so be honest with Him. He is not surprised by weariness, weakness, or wrongs. He says, "Come closer, so I can comfort you and then show you *My* perspective."

We must also take care to deliver the right Word at the right time to hurting friends. Scripture tells us to *"weep with those who weep"* (Romans 12:15). Healing words are well-timed and thoughtful, not trite, tired phrases.

STRONGER WITH OTHERS

We need each other to be spiritually healthy *and* to see the full beauty of God. Unity strengthens individual faith and our collective witness to the world.

Spiritual fitness has a purpose beyond a better life for yourself. God calls you to help the weak and share others' burdens. You can do this by first taking ownership of your personal growth, and then by encouraging others with truth and love. ❖

Getting spiritually fit is hard, but so is living as a spiritual invalid. The apostle Paul said spiritual exercise leads to eternal rewards (1 Timothy 4:8). But how do we exercise our faith? How do we grow stronger in Christ using the power of His Word?

WORK OUT WITH JESUS

Jesus said His yoke is easy and His load is light. If your life feels heavy, something may be out of line. Check out The Message's paraphrase of this familiar passage:

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly (Matthew 11:28–30).

Instead of trying to carry everything ourselves, we need to walk with Jesus and let Him do the heavy lifting.



Nothing But His Love

Building your life on the truth that God loves YOU...changes everything!

God's love (*agape*) for us is perfect—it's the source of our very being, the foundation for our faith, and the fuel we need to live well! When we learn to receive God's love and share it, we help usher in His Kingdom and power to impact others' eternities.

Agape love is considered the highest, purest form of love. It encompasses charity, affection, and goodwill. It's most often used to describe God's love for us and the type of love we are to display to others.

Jesus reminds us that showing *agape* love is what should set

Christians apart from the rest of the world:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:34–35 ESV).

The purposes undergirding our life must rest on nothing but His love. In this fallen world, we are all prone to turn to counterfeit sources instead of the real thing. We seek the approval of others, aim for recognition, and chase

earthly pleasures as we strive to build a *good* life. But Scripture—and experience—testify clearly: Nothing but the love of Jesus withstands life's pressures or produces eternal fruit.

The classic passage John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world..."* reveals that love acts sacrificially and purposefully to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). Those who receive His sacrificial love must reveal Jesus to other people—this is the essence of God's masterful plan to connect us to one another and to the Savior of our souls.

Truly building your life on the truth that GOD LOVES YOU changes everything and sets you free to love others. Any love that is not rooted in the power of God will be tainted with selfish motivations. We can love with *agape* love only *"because He first loved us"* (1 John 4:19).

To simply say that God is loving without living in and displaying that love is powerless. When you accept God's love and make it a part of who you are, you experience true transformation. He works His love and joy within you...to empower you to impact your world.

Meditate on one of the following verses each week this month, and watch God's love radiate through you to others around you. ❖



Week One:

"God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"

(Romans 5:8 ESV).



Week Two:

"The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness"

(Lamentations 3:22–23 ESV).



Week Three:

"So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God"

(Ephesians 3:17–19 ESV).



Week Four:

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love"

(1 John 4:7–8)

Make Happy Happen!

How long has it been since you felt a level of contagious, infectious, unflappable, unstoppable happiness? For many, perhaps most of us, the answer is “Well, it’s been a while. I used to be happy, but then life took its toll.”

“The disease took my health.”
“The economy took my job.” “The jerk took my heart.”

Something pilfered our happiness. It can seem such a fragile thing, this joy. Here one day. Tomorrow scattered by the winds of a storm.

Still we keep searching for it, longing for it, this sense of contentment and well-being. Worldwide, people profess that happiness is their most cherished goal. Magazine covers promise everything from sexual happiness to financial contentment. I googled *happy hour*, and in one second, 75 million options invited my click.

Marketing companies get this. Television commercials make grand promises: Want to be happy? Buy our hand cream. Want some joy? Sleep on this mattress. Desire a dose of delight? Eat at this restaurant, drive this car, wear this dress.

Happiness. Everyone craves it. And everyone benefits from it. Happy people enjoy higher odds of a strong marriage, lower odds of divorce, and superior work performance. They are also healthier. In one study researchers found a correlation between happiness and fatter pocketbooks. Others indicated that happy people are more effective leaders than Debbie Downers. Happiness, it turns out, helps everyone.

But fewer people are finding it. Only one-third of Americans surveyed said they were happy. Smiles are in short supply. By some estimates, clinical depression is 10

times more rampant now than it was a century ago.

What’s up? How do we explain the gloom? While the answers are varied and complex, among them must be this idea: We are using the wrong door.

The oft-used front door to happiness is the one described by the advertising companies: acquire, retire, and aspire to drive faster, dress trendier, and drink more. Happiness happens when you lose the weight, get the date, find the mate, or discover your fate. It’s wide, this front door to happiness. Yet for all its promise, it fails to deliver.

There is another option. It requires no credit card, monthly mortgage, or stroke of fortune. It demands no airline tickets or hotel reservations. Age, ethnicity, and gender are not factors. You don’t have to change jobs, change cities, change looks, or change neighborhoods. But you might need to change doors.

The motto on the front door says, “Happiness happens when you get.”

The sign on the lesser-used back door counters, “Happiness happens when you give.”

The words of Jesus are spot-on: “*It is more blessed to give than to receive*” (Acts 20:35). Because when you do, it has a boomerang effect. Happiness happens when we give it away.

This is such great news. You can’t control your genetics. You aren’t in charge of the weather, the traffic, or the occupant of the White House. But you can lower the anger level in your city. You can lighten the load and brighten the day of other human beings. And don’t be surprised when you begin to sense a newfound joy yourself.

In the entryway is Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was accused of much, but He was never ever described as a grump, sourpuss, or self-centered jerk. He spoke words of resounding affirmation.

His purpose statement reads, “*I came to give life with joy and abundance*” (John 10:10 VOICE). Jesus was happy and wants us to be the same. ❖



With over 100 million books in print, **Max Lucado** is one of America’s most read authors. He lives in Texas and serves the Oak Hills Church.

Excerpt from *How Happiness Happens* by Max Lucado.
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“I was delivered from witchcraft at the hands of my mother and sisters. God has renewed my spirit and saved me. I feel so alive. May your ministry continue to pray for me.”—*Janet G.*

“Hi, thanks for the good job you are doing. May God support you mightily. You saved me—I was about to commit suicide, then I came across this site. It comforted me. I felt relief, and as I go on reading daily inspiration, I am growing so strong.”—*Juma T.*



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A Merry Heart...

does good, like medicine. – Proverbs 17:22

I read recipes the same way I read science fiction. I get to the end, and I think, “Well, *that's* not going to happen.”



Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad.

I'm skeptical of anyone who tells me they do yoga every day. That's a bit of a stretch.

A clear conscience is usually the sign of a bad memory.



I wanted to learn how to make ice cream, so I started attending Sundae School.

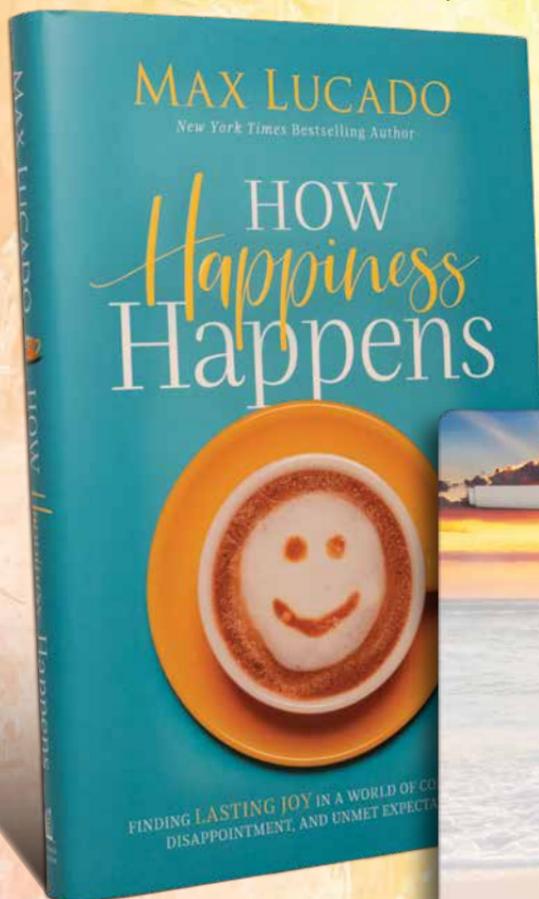
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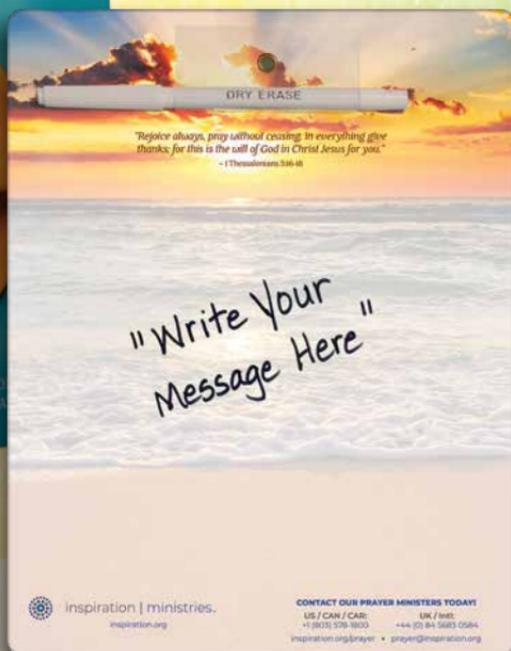
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