

JULY 2024

inspiration

M A G A Z I N E



believe
for more

Stuck!

Gideon's Victory

Trusting God



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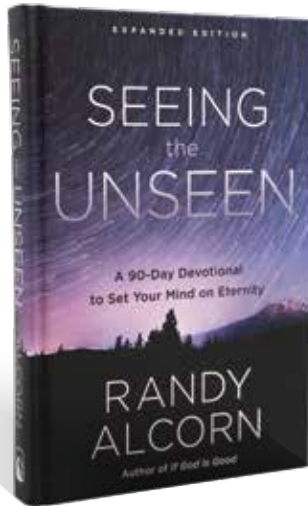


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Believe For More!

Turn to **page 5** where David Cerullo shares five faith opportunities to pursue the desires of God, obey His instructions, and claim the promises that He's set forth in His Word.



Turn to **page 28** for details about our THANK YOU GIFT.

Act quickly—our supplies are limited.

EDITOR'S CORNER



Roone Acree

This month's magazine is all about unleashing your faith and believing God for more. It doesn't matter what gloom and doom you might see on today's newspaper headlines or TV broadcasts...Jesus says **NOTHING** can stand in your way when you trust His Word. You cannot allow the devil to sow seeds of fear and doubt.

Step out in faith, and trust the Lord to move the mountains in your life. We are praying for you today, asking God to give you amazing breakthroughs as you fully unleash your faith!

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The Healing Power of Forgiveness

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[Read More](#)



COFFEE with Kim

Join Kim Crabbil & friends for real conversation & seltzer to share!

[Learn More](#)



Greater: What is Your Legacy?

For those who love movies about football or true stories of...

[Read More](#)

STRENGTHEN your walk

Let's Dance

Whatever life brings, you can dance to the music of God's promises and His purpose for you! Join Kim Crabbil now for Dancing on Your Dash.



LONGING TO FEEL FULLY ALIVE?

Discover how to live joyfully and vibrantly!

Receive this THANK YOU GIFT by saving a card for each of \$45 or more!

Today's Prayer

"I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God's throne. And the books were opened, including the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books."

Revelation 20:12 NLT



Have A Prayer Request? [Submit Your Prayer Here](#)



That's Interesting

"I've learned that our background and circumstances may have influenced who we are, but we are responsible for who we become."

- Charles Stanley

More people are killed annually by cows than sharks.

If honey is correctly stored and uncontaminated, it will never spoil.

Recipe of the Day: [Saffron Halibut Prosciutto](#)

[On This Day in History](#) February 19th

Brighten Your Day with GOD'S WORD

Discovering more about God through His Word can make your faith stronger, but sometimes it's hard to know where to start. Don't worry, we can help! Sign up today for our FREE e-newsletter. Each day, you'll receive a short Bible verse and a prayer suggestion—along with other awesome resources for your spiritual walk.

It's like giving your faith a little pick-me-up, perfect for any time or place!



Your 5 Faith Opportunities



Now's YOUR time to find victory in Jesus.

You've heard the names Wilbur and Orville Wright, I'm sure. Many years ago, people thought they were absolutely crazy...and who could blame them?

The two brothers from Ohio traveled all the way to Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, to test a contraption they believed could rise above the earth and actually fly.

On a cold, windy morning in December 1903, after three days of failure, the Wright's aeroplane made it off the ground for 12 seconds—flying just 120 feet. They repeated their efforts throughout the day, finally hovering above the ground for 59 seconds and traveling 852 feet.

That doesn't sound like much of an achievement, yet for the first time, man had defied the pull of gravity in a heavier-than-air craft. That small beginning transformed our world in ways no one could have imagined at the time.

The Wright brothers did something many people are afraid to do: They seized their



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opportunity. They didn't shrink from fear; they didn't complain about the challenges, and they didn't stop when they faced an onslaught of problems. They grabbed their chance for success, and they refused to give up until they accomplished their goal.

I share that story with you because each day is a new opportunity for you to use your faith and do something extraordinary for Christ. Just like Wilbur and Orville, you can boldly seize each chance you get and believe God for guidance each step of the way.

In Isaiah 41:10, the Lord says not to be afraid. He *"will strengthen you"* (NKJV). That means you need not be fearful or worried when an opportunity presents itself...God is with you to accomplish what you cannot do on your own. God's strength will be with you, will undergird you, and will infuse you with His power...right now...hallelujah!

And there's something even better. The verse goes on to say that He will uphold you with His *"righteous right hand."* In every opportunity, you can have the confidence that God is with you and that He is making your path sure through His own strength. Each moment is an opportunity for success because of the One who is on your side.

You may pause in this moment and think, *Well, I don't feel like I have opportunities to do anything great. I really don't see how God is providing the strength to push me through to victory.* I can understand what you may be feeling—sometimes you can get so down on yourself that you fail to recognize the chance for victory in your life. It's easy to get discouraged by circumstances and overlook opportunities to use your faith. So let me give you five faith opportunities you have today that you may have not thought about before...

an opportunity to OBEY GOD

My friend, as you faithfully obey whatever God is calling you to do, you can trust Him to help and strengthen you. He is your loving Heavenly Father, and you are His child. Know that every act of obedience lessens the distance between you and the breakthrough you're waiting for God to provide!

The Lord's principle of seedtime and harvest is an eternal principle, and one you can confidently stand on. As you faithfully walk with Him, you can have great expectations for your future and the wonderful plans God has for you!

an opportunity to SPREAD KINDNESS

Just as we must open our hands to the Lord, releasing our lives and possessions into His care, the Bible also repeatedly instructs us to open our hands to bless others. Instead of being miserly and trying to hang on to what we have, we're told to be generous, especially to the poor:

Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.
(Proverbs 19:17 ESV).

If we attend to the needs of the poor, God says He will bless us in all our works and in everything we put our hands to do. God blesses us, so we can be a blessing to others (Genesis 12:2). And the more we set our hearts to bless God's Kingdom and people in need, the more He will bless us in return.

an opportunity to BELIEVE GOD'S PROMISES

If you don't believe in God's blessings, it's unlikely you will receive His blessings. Why?

FIVE OPPORTUNITIES

Obey God

Spread Kindness

Believe God's
Promises

Quit Striving

Experience
His Peace

*"Fear not, for
I am with you;
Be not
dismayed, for I
am your God.
I will strengthen
you, Yes, I will
help you, I will
uphold you with
My righteous
right hand."*

Isaiah 41:10 NKJV

Because faith is an indispensable key to activating and receiving the promises of God.

Jesus said, “According to your faith let it be to you” (Matthew 9:29 NKJV). What an incredible principle! If you believe God will prosper you, He will. But if you don’t believe He will prosper you, He won’t! You see, God will honor your faith.

an opportunity to QUIT STRIVING

Instead of working hard, you need to fill your heart with Christ, so He can live His life through you (Galatians 2:20). You don’t have to remain locked in the trap Paul describes in Romans 7—the drudgery of religious striving and self-effort...trying to live the Christian life apart from the supernatural enablement of God’s Spirit.

If this frustration has been your experience lately, I encourage you to STOP striving and allow the Lord to fill you with His Spirit. Put on the identity of Jesus and let His incredible love transform your life!

an opportunity to EXPERIENCE HIS PEACE

Colossians 3:15 tells us that God’s peace should “rule in your hearts” (NKJV). This means you shouldn’t move forward on important decisions unless the Lord has first given you His peace.

However, anxious thoughts can destroy your peace and fill your mind with all sorts of scenarios about the future. When you pray for God’s plan to be fulfilled in your life, you need to silence the what ifs and refuse to become overwhelmed by the fears and distractions around you.

Peace will come when you say yes to God and sincerely seek His direction, even when it may not initially be what you want to hear. It will come when you meditate on God’s Word and trust Him with every detail of your life.

DON’T WAIT... MAKE IT HAPPEN!

Your life in Christ is surrounded by opportunities—don’t let another moment go by before you seize them.

Every day is a chance for you to pursue the desires of God, obey His Word and claim the promises that He’s set forth in His Word. Today is your day of victory.

Be the warrior for Christ that God has called you to be. Use your faith to break the boundaries of your circumstances and receive what is rightfully yours—God’s amazing, covenant blessings!



God Is Amazing!

Inspiration Ministries Monthly Partners are winning souls and experiencing abundant living through a monthly cycle of sowing and reaping.

An **Inspiration Ministries Monthly Partner** is someone who commits to **sowing monthly seeds** into God’s Kingdom through the Good Ground of Inspiration Ministries. Each month, you will impact thousands of people worldwide through our media outreaches!

About a week or so after I sowed my first \$58 seed, we got a check in the mail for the rest of my husband’s disability retirement. It was only for \$2,005, but it sure helped to catch things up when we desperately needed it! We didn’t even dream they owed him anything! God is totally amazing and supernatural!—Sharon, MI

To be a blessing to others as God is blessing you, call us toll free to *automatically* sow your monthly seed for souls. Your financial seeds will make an eternal difference in the lives of people around the world who are making Jesus Christ the Lord of their lives through our outreaches.

Thanks to partners like you, over 5 MILLION souls said yes to Jesus last year through our evangelistic outreaches!

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Often our pain comes as a result of going our own way.

One morning, my friend and I (Ed) launched a boat out onto a beautiful, dark lake. The water was coffee black, and lily pads and moss floated on the surface. As we motored across the water, we noticed some crazy creatures on the banks—water moccasins, nutria, alligators, and snapping turtles. We were so distracted by looking at everything on the shore that we missed a hazard right in front of us. Wham! We hit something beneath the boat. In a swampy body of water, hitting something is not uncommon, but this something felt substantial.

“We’ll keep going,” I thought. But we didn’t. When I looked

around the boat, I saw nothing but the seemingly bottomless muck that surrounded us. We rocked the vessel back and forth, but nothing happened. We paddled, but nothing happened. We cranked up the motor, but nothing happened.

“Oh no,” I thought. And I probably said this part out loud: “We’re really stuck!”

Outwardly, I acted like it was no big deal. But inwardly, I shuddered because I knew what I had to do next. I curled my toes over the transom of the boat and jumped in. I swam beneath the hull, feeling around with my hands for what was messing with

us, which was slightly terrifying. What if it was a massive alligator? But I had to keep going; I had to figure out why we were stuck if we wanted to get unstuck.

Finally, my hand brushed against something solid with a rough exterior. Bubbles floated to the surface as I groaned. Our problem was big. Massive, actually. It was a big, ol’ tree stump that had literally impaled our boat—we were a floating shish kebab. The stump had penetrated the boat’s fiberglass exterior through to the Styrofoam insulation, so the more we rocked the boat, the more we bored a deep hole into the hull. If we had continued rocking the boat, we would have sunk.

It was a harrowing experience, but also a vivid analogy of what it’s like when we get stuck in the dark and murky waters of pain. We do what we can to free ourselves, but we’re not getting anywhere. Something beneath the surface keeps us from moving forward. We’ve hit a stump. And while a stump might take any number

of forms in our lives, one stump often underlies them all—the stump of pride.

While much of the emotional turmoil and hurt we experience comes from painful circumstances that happened to us, sometimes our pain is caused by us. We suffer because of decisions we’ve made. It takes courage to admit that and to own our regrettable behavior and poor choices. Even if our decisions were understandable at the time, that doesn’t make them acceptable. But no matter what we’ve done, we can rely on this promise: *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9 NIV).

If your pain is a result of your own decisions, know that your suffering is not punishment from God. It is simply the natural consequence of going your own way. God forgives you. But, like a good parent, He loves you enough to allow you to experience the consequences of your decisions. This is how all of us learn and grow. ❖



Ed and Lisa Young are New York Times bestselling authors and the founding pastors of Fellowship Church in the Dallas–Fort Worth area. They have been married for over 40 years and have four children and six grandchildren.

Excerpt from *A Path through Pain* by Ed and Lisa Young. Copyright 2023 by Zondervan. Used by permission of Zondervan, www.zondervan.com.

A Family Restored

David and Valerie's seed of faith triggered their family's breakthrough.

Have you ever had to step out in faith? Have you ever trusted God for restoration of your life and relationships? Our partners David and Valerie, have...and they've never regretted it.

The couple met in the Philippines during David's time in the military. As a military wife, Valerie knows what it means to go overseas and leave her whole world behind, but at the time, she didn't realize the toll it would take on her. She lost connection with virtually all of her family members and cried out to God for restoration.

That's when God's grace kicked in.

The couple stepped out in faith and sowed a seed into Inspiration Ministries: "God works in your life according to what is in your heart," observed David. "Sowing seeds works because it shows what you value in life."

Shortly after this act of faith, they received a call from Valerie's family—her brother Diego had

received a cancer diagnosis. The family's love for Diego compelled them to begin meeting online on a regular basis, renewing and strengthening their once tattered relationship.

God used the crisis to answer their prayers for restoration. But the God of immeasurably more had only just begun to work. Diego began to read his Bible, attend church, and surrender his life fully to the Lord. The entire family even celebrated together at his baptism. Diego's new life in Jesus soon birthed another salvation. His son Bok-Bok also accepted Jesus Christ and embraced the free gift of eternal life!

Now David and Valerie love telling others their story of restoration and redemption. They have learned the importance of stepping out in faith to sow seeds into God's Kingdom—which they've discovered is *also* sowing into their own promised blessings. ❖

If YOU need a breakthrough today, contact our International Prayer Center. Although your breakthrough may not come immediately, the Bible promises, "In due season we WILL reap" (Galatians 6:9 ESV).

God Answers Prayer

Find encouragement in these powerful testimonies.

If you ever have any doubts about whether God is still in the miracle-working business, you need to give a call to our International Prayer Center. Wonderful breakthroughs are happening all the time as our prayer ministers intercede for people's health, finances, emotions, and families.

Here's just a small sample of the healing testimonies we've received in answer to prayer:

Migraines vanished... "I called your International Prayer Center because I suffered so greatly from migraine headaches. Some of these would last five consecutive days without letting up. But after your prayer minister interceded for me, I rarely have headaches anymore! I give God the glory."—DIANE, Michigan

Surgery canceled... "Surgery was scheduled to operate on the pain and swelling I was experiencing in my arm. But I called your International Prayer Center and prayed with Frances, one of your prayer ministers. As we prayed, I felt the power of God move inside my arm, and the pain and swelling left immediately! I was able to lift my arm above my head, which I could not do before. I called my doctor to tell him about my healing, and he canceled my surgery!"—ANNIE, Texas

Cancer gone... "You prayed for my daughter Marsha to be healed of uterine cancer, and now there's no trace of it!"—JANICE, Pennsylvania

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Is It Really as Simple as Just Ask?

In the heart of the New Testament lies the book of James, a short yet profoundly practical letter offering timeless wisdom to believers. It is here in chapter 4, verses 2 and 3, we find a powerful passage on the potency and pitfalls of prayer: “*You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures*” (NASB).

Practically applying James 4:2–3 in our Christian walk demands serious introspection. Are our prayers self-centered, driven by selfish desires and ambitions? Or do they emanate from a heart surrendered to God’s will, desiring His Kingdom above all else? Are we seeking God’s provision to fulfill His purposes and advance His Kingdom, or are we consumed by temporal pleasures and our own desires for personal gain?

This passage challenges us to cultivate humility and submission in our prayers. Rather than dictating terms to God, we should approach Him with reverence and trust,

acknowledging His sovereignty and wisdom. As we align our desires with His, we will find fulfillment not merely in receiving what we ask for, but also in experiencing the intimacy of true communion with the Father.

In essence, James 4:2–3 reminds us that the efficacy of prayer hinges not only on our asking, but also on the purity of our motives. As we seek God’s Kingdom first and foremost, our prayers become potent instruments for His glory, ushering in His Kingdom purposes in our lives and in the world.

The passage echoes this fundamental truth: God invites us to bring our needs and desires to bring our needs and desires before Him in prayer. Yet, prayer isn’t merely about presenting a shopping list of desires to a divine vending machine; it’s about aligning our will with God’s and seeking His guidance and provision for His glory. His will is that we live life abundantly in every area, including finances. It is okay to ask God to provide for you financially to meet every need and more, so you can be a blessing.

You might wonder, “How can I be generous when I am struggling to make ends meet?” The answer lies at the heart of our Christian faith in the principle of being blessed to be a blessing—a concept deeply rooted in Scripture and central to the Christian ethos. From the covenantal promises to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, the idea of blessing others flows as a consistent thread throughout the biblical narrative, inviting us into a life marked by generosity, compassion, and sacrificial love.

In 2 Corinthians 9:6–11, the apostle Paul encourages believers to give generously and cheerfully. He assures them that *God is able to bless them abundantly* so that in all things, at all times, they may have all they need and abound in every good work. Paul emphasizes the reciprocal nature of blessing—*that as we give generously, God blesses us abundantly, enabling us to continue blessing others.*

So, to answer the question about giving in tough times, remember the widow’s mite. God is not fixated on the amount of your generosity as long as it is a meaningful amount to you, and the heart motive and attitude behind your giving are right.

The principle of being blessed to be a blessing challenges us to view our blessings—whether financial, material, relational, or spiritual—as resources to be shared rather than hoarded. It invites us to adopt a mindset of abundance rather than scarcity, trusting in God’s provision and seeking opportunities to bless others in tangible ways.

Practically, embracing this principle requires cultivating a lifestyle of generosity, compassion, and hospitality. It involves not only giving financially, but also investing time, energy, and resources in serving others, meeting their needs, and extending grace and mercy. It means living with open hands and open hearts, recognizing that everything we have ultimately belongs to God and is entrusted to us for stewardship and service.

When we approach praying and asking for God’s blessings in our life, we must do so with humility, reverence, and a genuine desire to align our will with God’s. Then we can experience the true richness of communion with the Father, whose ways are higher than ours and whose love surpasses all understanding. ❖



David Robertson leads the Ministry Outreach team at Inspiration Ministries. He and his wife, Stacy, live in Indian Land, South Carolina, with their beloved dog, Tyson.



3 KEYS to Gideon's Victory!

Even the most unlikely of heroes can rise to the occasion when guided by God's power.



by Ben Cerullo

As soon as you acknowledge that you can't do it on your own, God will step in and bring you victory.

The Bible tells the stories of dozens of people who seemed unlikely to ever do anything great. Many were fearful; others were failures, yet God enabled them to do the miraculous and triumph over their enemies.

One of these biblical characters is Gideon, an unlikely hero for sure. When God called him, he was hiding in a wine press and threshing wheat, getting ready for an attack by the Midianites. He ultimately would defeat the huge Midianite army, using just 300 men. But three key steps were involved in his victory as we see in Judges 6 and 7 (NKJV).

KEY #1 Encounter the Supernatural

When Gideon was at his lowest point, living in fear and desperation, the Angel of the Lord appeared to him and said he would save Israel from the Midianites (6:21–23). Without seeing something supernatural, it's doubtful Gideon

ever would have found the courage to step out and obey God.

KEY #2 Get God's Perspective

Despite Gideon's dismal circumstances at the time, the Angel of the Lord said to him, "*The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor! [...] Have I not sent you?*" (6:12, 14) Instead of seeing Gideon's weaknesses, failures, or mistakes, God saw a man of fearless courage—a victor instead of a victim.

Yet Gideon didn't initially accept God's evaluation. The Lord had to change his perspective and get him to start seeing himself differently.

Perhaps you've had the same struggle as Gideon did with low self-esteem. "How can God use me?" you ask. "Look at what I've done and all the times I've failed." If this has been your mind-set, you need to let God give you a new perspective.

KEY #3 Rely on God's Power

The Lord told Gideon, "*Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man*" (6:16). How was one man supposed to defeat an army that was "*as numerous as locusts*" (7:12)? Only one way...with God's power.

God is asking *you* to do the impossible too. He allows you to face problems you can never solve in your own strength. If you see a situation that looks impossible, remember that God says, "I'm not limited to the natural. My power has no limits. If you could do it in your own strength, you wouldn't need Me."

As soon as you acknowledge that you can't do it on your own, God will step in and bring you victory. And when He gives you victory in an impossible situation, He alone will receive the glory.

When he accepted God's plan and became willing for God to use him, "*The Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon*" (6:34). Gideon wasn't given additional *human* strength—he received the very strength of God.

In the same way, God wants to clothe *you* in extraordinary power, enabling you to step into your destiny. He will never leave you to fight your battles in your own strength and ability.

Friend, it's time to start looking at the immensity of your God instead of the immensity of your need. You may be in your darkest hour, surrounded by enemies like Gideon was. But fear not! God is going to come and meet you at the point of your need. He's the God of abundance and overflow, ready to give you overwhelming victory. ❖



“One generation shall praise Your works to another!” —Psalm 145:4 (NKJV)

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Real Events

BIBLE READING: EZEKIEL 1

Many people have only a vague understanding of when the events of the Bible took place. There is a general understanding they happened in the past, but it can be easy to forget they took place at *specific* times and in *specific* places. The messages were delivered by real people to real people who faced real circumstances and needed to make real decisions about real problems.

We get a fresh perspective on this when we read the opening of Ezekiel. In a more familiar rendering, the NASB describes when this took place: “*In the thirtieth year, on the fifth day of the fourth month.*” But the NLT’s translation gives this a sense of immediacy. It is based on the understanding that “*the fifth day of the fourth month*” was, in fact, July 31. The events really happened to Ezekiel.

This is a reminder that the events of the Bible happened in real time, on real days, in real places. Prophecies are delivered on real days. It is almost like reading today’s news. The Bible should have that sense of freshness to us. While conveying timeless truths, it is also relevant to specific situations and specific people. It is relevant to the issues you face.

Remember, God knows what you face. Every problem. Every challenge. He knows the messages He wants to deliver to you. He is with you right now.

How can you relate today’s passage to your life today?

MONDAY

July
1

On July 31 of my thirtieth year, while I was with the Judean exiles beside the Kebar River in Babylon, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.

Ezekiel 1:1 NLT

PRAYER:

Father, I commit these issues to You: _____. Thank You for the answers I need. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Everyone who keeps on asking receives; and he who keeps on seeking finds; and to him who keeps on knocking, [the door] will be opened.

Matthew 7:8 AMPC

PRAYER:

Father, I commit these issues to You: _____ . I will continue to ask for answers. I believe the right doors will be opened. In Jesus' name, amen.

What door have you been knocking on persistently?

Persistence

BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 7

God's Word is filled with promises. We are directed to commit our needs to Him, have childlike faith, believe and trust Him completely, and know He listens and will answer.

The Bible also indicates there may be times when problems might not be solved quickly (or according to our timetable or desires). Some answers may take time and persistence. But God has His own timetable for His answers.

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus provided clear instructions about the importance of *persistence*. There are times we need to pray about a matter again and again. If there is something we need or an obstacle we need to overcome, we are encouraged to seek answers and *keep on seeking*. If a door needs to be opened, He told us to keep on knocking until it opens.

Today, do you have a physical problem or a financial need? Do you have an important decision to make? Do you feel burdened and need guidance? No matter the severity of your need, you can call on God for answers. You may have asked before, but do not hesitate to seek Him again. Ask and keep on asking. Seek and keep on seeking. Knock and keep on knocking.

Do not feel awkward about being persistent. Jesus Himself told us that persistence in prayer is key to receiving answers. Believe in Him. Keep on believing. Keep on asking.

Overconfidence

BIBLE READING: PSALM 20

In the months before the start of World War II, the consensus was that the French army was the most powerful force in the world. This was one reason some did not feel the Nazis would attack France.

But after the Germans launched their assault on May 10, 1940, the world was shocked as the French forces collapsed, and France was defeated within six weeks. People everywhere wondered how this had happened.

Following the war's conclusion, the French parliament created a committee to study this issue. They concluded that one reason for the defeat was the *excessive confidence* the French army had in its own ability. In short, the general staff of the French army was "convinced of its infallibility." This led to prejudices and a whole series of mistakes.

The Bible warns us about this kind of misplaced confidence. We are to be careful in whom we place our trust. David wrote, "*Some trust in chariots, and some in horses,*" but ultimately, all these people will bow down and fall. Only those who trust God will emerge victorious. As David said, "*We will remember the name of the LORD our God.*"

Ask yourself whom you trust. How easily do you become overconfident or trust in the wrong resources or people? Learn from history. Be sure you trust in God. Be on guard against overconfidence or blindness to facts. Let Him direct you even in the smallest details.

Are you tempted to be overconfident in yourself?

Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the LORD our God. They have bowed down and fallen; but we have risen and stand upright.

Psalm 20:7–8 NKJV

PRAYER:

Father, I humble myself before You. I trust in You. Thank You for Your peace. I believe You will provide all I need. In Jesus' name, amen.

You shall consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim a release throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, and each of you shall return to his own property, and each of you shall return to his family.

Leviticus 25:10 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for setting me free! I cast my cares on You. Thank You for caring for me. Thank You for freedom and victory! In Jesus' name, amen.

What are you proclaiming freedom from today?

Liberty

BIBLE READING: LEVITICUS 25

In 1751, the Pennsylvania Assembly ordered a bell for its State House to be made by the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in London. This bell has the inscription from Leviticus 25, “Proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all the inhabitants thereof.”

This became known as the Liberty Bell and played a special role throughout the American struggle for independence. Every time it rang, the people had an opportunity to remember the Bible verse that proclaimed liberty throughout their land.

The verse chosen for the bell celebrates independence and freedom. The word jubilee comes from a Hebrew word that means trumpet, which blew to signal the beginning of the year of jubilee. It spoke of the promise that one day every fifty years, debts would be forgiven, and slaves would be set free. It was a time of celebration.

This is a time each year when Americans celebrate freedom. For people everywhere, this is a time to remember the freedom God has given us. Jesus was born, died, and rose again so that each of us might be free. Because of His sacrifice, we can be freed from sin and the curse of death. We can be free from guilt, fear, and worry.

Today, remember you can bring any problems to God. He can forgive sins and heal. All His promises are true! You don't have to live in fear. You can be free in Christ! Make this a day of celebration! In Christ, you are free!

Deeper Life

BIBLE READING: DANIEL 9

What made Clifford Curzon a great pianist? One key was his commitment to probe for deeper meaning in every piece he played. Curzon spent hours in practice, examining phrases that others passed over with little thought. He experienced joy at discovering new truths and finding hidden treasures. His dedication resulted in playing marked by rare distinction and continually fresh insight.

This is the kind of attitude God rewards in spiritual matters. He knows how easily we can be content with a shallow understanding or good enough faith. We have a choice: We can have a superficial understanding of the Bible and live a lukewarm Christian life, or we can go deeper.

Think about these issues in your life. When you read the Bible, do you call out to God for answers? Are you just going through the motions and staying on the surface? Do you crave His insights and want to tap into His power? Are you content with a shallow understanding or do you really want to grow in your faith, dig deeper, see His principles come alive in your life, and experience miracle-working power?

Think of Daniel's example. The Bible tells us that he intensely sought the Lord. As a result, God gave him profound revelations.

God rewards people with this kind of commitment, persistence, and child-like faith. Dedicate yourself to this kind of diligent faith and persistence.

How do you intentionally seek to know God better?

I set my face unto the LORD God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession.

Daniel 9:3–4 KJV

PRAYER:

Father, I want to move to deeper levels in my spiritual walk. Open my eyes. Grant me the fullness of Your Spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.

He saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar.

John 19:14–15 KJV

PRAYER:

Father, forgive me for placing my hope in the people and things of this world. I declare that Jesus is my Lord and Savior. I surrender my life to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Who is your king? To whom do you give your time, talents, and treasures?

Your King

BIBLE READING: JOHN 19

During the time of Jesus' ministry, Rome was ruled by Tiberius, who became Roman emperor in AD 14. Generally, he was considered to have been a fine administrator who accomplished many positive things. However, in later years, he became more of a tyrant. His insecurities increased, and he felt that others conspired against him. He developed poor relations with the Roman Senate and conducted a reign of terror in which many were accused of treason.

In AD 27, Tiberius left Rome to visit the southern parts of Italy. En route, he visited the island of Capri and decided to stay there for the rest of his life. On Capri, he became even more distrustful. He built a dozen villas with prisons, underground dungeons, torture chambers, and places of execution. He filled these villas with treasures and art objects and brought to the island many who had been leaders in Rome.

The last years of his life were marked by cruelty as he indulged in obscene entertainment, often killing those who displeased him. It is amazing to realize that, when the chief priests cried out, "We have no king but Caesar," they were speaking of this cruel, insecure, unbalanced man!

Who is your king? Do you worship the people in this world who have power and wealth? Or do you worship Jesus? Make Him the Lord of your life! Dedicate your time, talents, and treasures to Him.

Delighting

BIBLE READING: PSALM 1

Think about this truth: God has prepared *unimaginable* joys for us! For you! He wants to bless *every* part of your life, so you can have "*overwhelming victory through Christ*" (Romans 8:37).

How do we experience these blessings? One clear way is by putting into practice insights from the first psalm. The starting point is being *filled with God's Word* and putting it into *practice*. This pattern leads to a life that is *fruitful* and *productive*. We see how blessings *flow* into our lives with every need supplied in abundance. We can stay stable and strong when our roots run deep into the soil of God's Word.

The Bible pictures us as being "*like trees planted along the riverbank*" (v. 3). We don't need to rush or worry for His nourishment by this constant stream that provides all we need. We can rest, be confident, and have His peace, knowing that we will *prosper* in everything we do.

But these blessings can be blocked. How? If we join with mockers, listen to sinners, or follow the advice of the wicked. The ungodly are not stable but are like "*the worthless chaff, scattered by the wind*" (v. 4). They will be "*condemned at the time of judgment*" (v. 5).

Today, believe God. *Expect* to receive His blessings. Stay rooted and grounded in Him. Always trust Him and delight in His Word. Avoid the path of the ungodly.

Where have you planted your roots?

Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. But they delight in the law of the LORD, meditating on it day and night.

Psalm 1:1–2 NLT

PRAYER:

Father, I desire to please You. I seek Your wisdom. I delight in Your Word and believe You for blessings. In Jesus' name, amen.

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

Hebrews 13:15 KJV

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, I am grateful You died for my sins. Thank You for all You have done for me. I praise You. In Your name, amen.

Describe how you feel about one day being in Heaven with Jesus.

Filled with Praises

BIBLE READING: HEBREWS 13

John Wilbur Chapman spent much of his life as a pastor and evangelist, but he also wrote many hymns. One of his most inspired moments occurred when he described the praise in his heart because of what Jesus had done.

He recalled how Heaven was filled with His praises and when “sin was as black as could be.” In that dark time, Jesus “came forth to be born of a virgin.” He dwelled among people and became our example.

Chapman expressed the many ways Jesus changed his life: “Living, He loved me; dying, He saved me; buried He carried my sins far away; rising, He justified freely forever; one day He’s coming—Oh, glorious day!”

Chapman recalled how Jesus was led up Calvary and nailed on the tree. Jesus bore our sins and became our Redeemer. “The grave could conceal Him no longer.” He arose, conquered death, and “now is ascended, my Lord evermore!”

But Chapman knew that Jesus was coming again. “One day the trumpet will sound for His coming.” It will be a day when the skies shine with His glories. This will be a wonderful day.

This same Jesus is yours. He died for your sins. He rose again, so you can have eternal life. And He’s coming again for you! Praise Him. Worship Him with your time, talents, and treasures. Commit your life to this wonderful Savior. He is worthy of all praise!

How Much Prayer?

BIBLE READING: LUKE 6

Jesus had an important decision to make: Who would be His apostles? He knew the candidates and had spent time with them. We might assume He had enough information to make His choices. But Jesus did not decide until He had *prayed*. He did not just pray a short prayer. He spent all night praying to God! And He prayed until He had the answer He needed.

How many Christians make this kind of commitment to prayer? We may pray when we have decisions to make, but how intense is that prayer? How much do we pray? A few minutes? A few seconds?

Right now, search your heart and think about the issues that you face. Are you basing your decision on your own experience and understanding, or the opinions of people around you? Have you truly sought God about these matters? He is ready to give you His wisdom and guide you to make the right choices. Call on Him and seek Him through dedicated prayer.

The Bible reminds us to trust in the Lord and not depend on our own understanding. As we seek His will in all we do, we are to be confident that He will direct our paths (Proverbs 3:5–6).

Seek God’s will and wisdom. Commit time to prayer. Seek God until you have the answers you need, however long it takes. He is ready to help you and give you His wisdom.

Do you need to allocate more time for prayer?

One day soon afterward Jesus went to a mountain to pray, and he prayed to God all night. At daybreak he called together all of his disciples and chose twelve of them to be apostles.

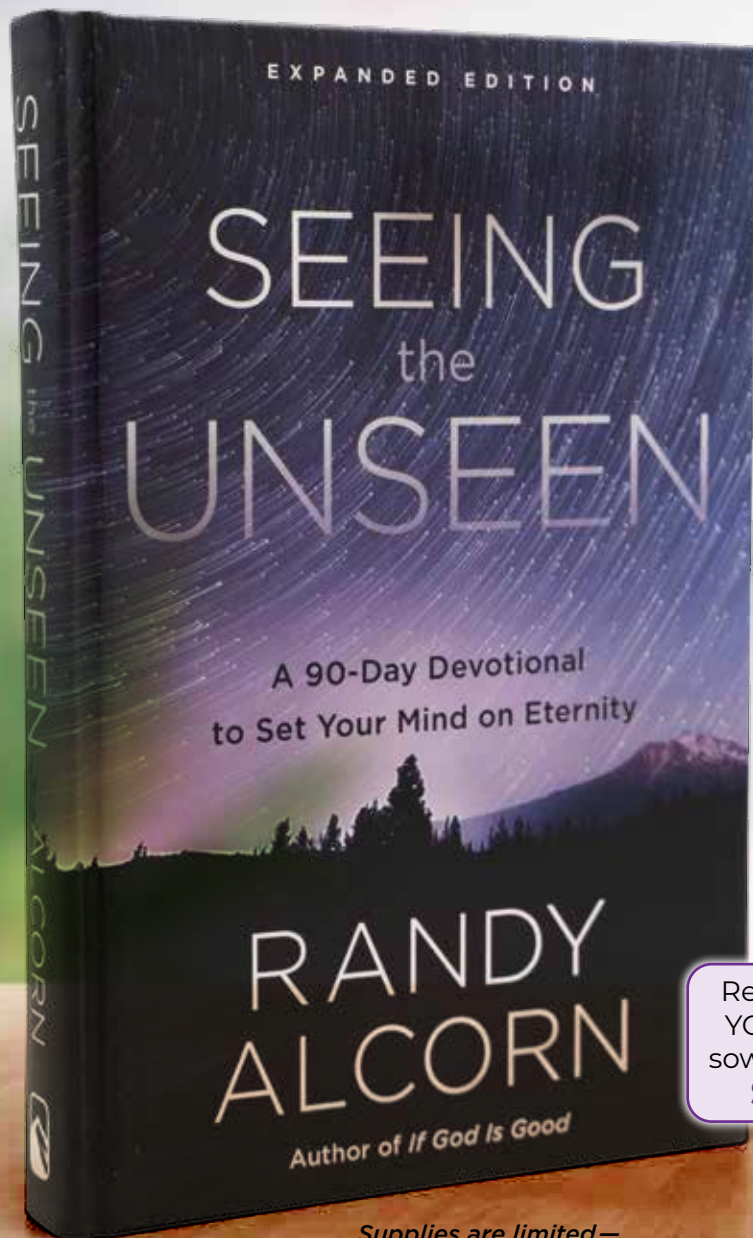
Luke 6:12–13 NLT

PRAYER:

Father, I commit these matters to You: _____. I ask for Your wisdom and guidance. Help me to know the right thing to do. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

Romans 13:13–14 NKJV

PRAYER:

Father, show me any sin that has gripped my life. Forgive these specific sins: _____ . Help me put on the Lord Jesus Christ. In His name, amen.

Write a confession of specific sins.

The Grip of Sin

BIBLE READING: ROMANS 13

While reading these verses, St. Augustine had a life-changing experience. Born in northern Africa, Augustine learned about Christianity from his mother. But as a young man, he embraced other religions. Eventually he returned to Christianity, yet he continued to accept worldly standards, even living with a common-law wife.

But concerned about sin, he studied Romans 13. He discovered that this passage led him to probe “the hidden depths of [his] soul.” He asked God to change his life and “a great storm broke within me, bringing with it a great deluge of tears.” He realized he was still enslaved by sin. God answered his prayers. “In an instant, it was as though the light of faith flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled.”

He found forgiveness, freedom, and cleansing and devoted the rest of his life to serving God and writing two of the most important books in Christian history *Confessions* and *City of God*.

Augustine learned how firmly sin can grip our lives, even if we are Christians. The pleasures and attraction of sin can seem overwhelming. But sin has a price. We cannot know freedom while sin rules our hearts and minds.

Today, realize that sin in any form can make you a slave. Ask God to reveal if any sins have taken hold of you, whether it is obvious or subtle, open or hidden. Let Jesus set you free.

Your Heart

BIBLE READING: 1 SAMUEL 16

When Samuel was looking for a king, David seemed to lack the necessary qualifications. Not even his father, Jesse, thought he was worthy of consideration. He was young and inexperienced. Yet to God, he was perfectly equipped and prepared.

The attitude of his critics could have intimidated David. But he was willing to trust God in every situation. He realized His principles apply in every situation. At a time when others were afraid and intimidated, David had faith and willingness to trust God.

Of all the people in the kingdom, David was most ready to be king. Others may have been intimidated by the giant, Goliath, but David trusted God and knew that He would give him victory.

David had learned key biblical principles when he was a shepherd. They worked whether he faced an army, a giant, or a wild animal. He simply needed to apply what he learned to new experiences and trust God.

The Bible reminds us that the secret to success is having the right attitude in the sight of God. David was willing and humble. He trusted God and applied the experiences, abilities, and resources he had been given. Most of all, God’s anointing was on David, and he was blessed and called by Him.

Today, trust God to help you in every situation you face. Don’t be afraid or intimidated. Have faith. Believe. Remember that God is looking at your heart.

Reflect on past experiences that have prepared you for new things.

Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.

1 Samuel 16:7 ESV

PRAYER:

Father, give me attitudes that please You. Thank You that You are with me. I trust You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

I am jealous for you with the jealousy of God himself. I promised you as a pure bride to one husband—Christ. But I fear that somehow your pure and simple devotion to Christ will be corrupted.

2 Corinthians 11:2–3 NLT

PRAYER:

Father, help me stay on guard against deceptions and complications. I want to obey Your Word. Thank You that I can trust You. In Jesus' name, amen.

How do you tend to complicate the Christian life?

Simple Truth

BIBLE READING: 2 CORINTHIANS 11

Although he lived long ago, William of Ockham developed a principle that still is effective. An influential religious leader and scholar in fourteenth-century England, he is most remembered for Ockham's razor theory, a principle stating that it is pointless to do with more what can be done with less.

This principle has been applied as a reminder of the benefits of simple solutions. For example, William would argue that when two theories might work, the simpler one should be preferred.

This principle applies to our spiritual lives as well. Paul taught the Corinthians that there are forces in the world that seek to *complicate* our lives. People (and Satan) can seek to disrupt our faith, confuse us, and distract us with clever-sounding ideas.

For example, Paul noted how Eve had been given everything she needed for success. She just needed to obey God. Instead, she was deceived by the serpent, who confused her with suggestions that led her to stray from God's truth.

Seek to stay on guard against temptations that might lead you away from "*your pure and simple devotion to Christ*." Spend time reading God's Word and learning to recognize His truth. Don't be deceived by false doctrines, complicated teachings, or people who might try to deceive you. Trust your life to Jesus, obey God's Word, and seek to serve Him with your life. It is that simple.

Alone

BIBLE READING: MARK 3

It was an important time in Jesus' ministry. Multitudes followed Him. Many were healed. Others were delivered from unclean spirits.

In this busy time, Jesus was conscious of His need for solitude. After this, He selected a special group to be His primary disciples. These were matters that required discernment and clarity. Here, for the first time in Mark's Gospel, we see Jesus going to a mountain, where He could make important decisions.

Jesus would return to the mountains on many occasions. We see how these mountains were special places where He could be alone with the Father. It was on a high mountain that Jesus was transfigured (Matthew 17:2). And it was on the Mount of Olives where Jesus delivered an important message just before His ascension.

Jesus also used mountains as analogies to convey spiritual truths. Illustrating the principle of faith, Jesus said that if you speak to a mountain, believing and without doubt that it will move, "*It will be granted [you]*" (Mark 11:23).

Mountains can be symbolic places for the followers of Jesus. These represent places of pilgrimage, places dedicated to prayer and study, and places where we can be more sensitive to God's presence.

Look for opportunities to spend time with God, freed from distractions. Pray, study, seek His help for the decisions you must make, and spend time alone with Him.

How can you make room in your schedule for time with your Father?

He went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him.

Mark 3:13 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I commit these needs to You: _____. Speak to me. Teach me. Guide me. Give me a greater sensitivity to Your presence. In Jesus' name, amen.

Sow your seed in the morning and do not be idle in the evening, for you do not know whether one or the other will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good.

Ecclesiastes 11:6 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for the resources and opportunities You have given me. Open my eyes to see how I can invest these resources. In Jesus' name, amen.

How are you using the resources and talents that God has given you?

Continual Investment

BIBLE READING: ECCLESIASTES 11

How does a person become a world-class musician? Natural abilities are important, but many with ability fail to live up to their potential. Over and over, great musicians testify to the impact of the investment of *time* to practice.

Ignacy Jan Paderewski, the great Polish pianist and statesman, once declared that “the very essence of success is *practice*.” Investing time is not optional for those wanting to be great.

Describing his opportunity to be music director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Sir Georg Solti recalled how he was challenged by the professionalism demonstrated by this orchestra. The players set a standard that caused him to always be prepared, ready, and excellent.

This commitment to excellence helps separate the extraordinary from the ordinary. This is expressed in the principle of seedtime and harvest (Genesis 8:22); God rewards those who faithfully invest the time and resources they have been given. Realize that blessings flow when we plant seeds we have been given and when we invest in His Kingdom and the lives of others.

This is a commitment that is repeated continually by those who are not content with the ordinary and want to achieve excellence.

Ask yourself what you are doing with the resources God has given you. Are you content with the ordinary or looking to receive the abundant harvest God has prepared? Commit to sowing. Always invest your time and resources.

Goaded

BIBLE READING: ECCLESIASTES 12

Left to their own devices, oxen often wander in the wrong direction. One time-honored way of keeping them on track was through a *goad*. These sharp-pointed sticks get their attention and help them move in the right direction.

The Bible uses the goad as a picture of the way God works in our lives. There are times when we want to go our own way or drift in the wrong direction. We sometimes draw wrong conclusions or think wrong thoughts. These are times when we might need a goad.

The Bible says that the words of the wise are like goads. They can get our attention and point us in the right direction. God often acts like a goad in our lives. He can act to spur us on and provide correction, so we look at life in new ways and correct our mistakes.

God gave us His Word because He wants us to understand His principles and experience the fullness of His blessings. He wants us to think His thoughts, be filled with His Spirit, have discernment, grow in our faith, and become more like Jesus. This can mean changing in some ways, so we are alert to deceptive ideas that can tempt and mislead us.

If you feel stretched or challenged, God may be *goad*ing you. Let Him speak to you to be sure you are on the right path.

Have you felt God prodding you in a different direction lately?

The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. My son, beware of anything beyond these.

Ecclesiastes 12:11–12 ESV

PRAYER:

Father, I surrender my life to You. Direct my steps. Point me in the right way to go. In Jesus' name, amen.

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit...and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel...that in it I may speak boldly.

Ephesians 6:18–20 NKJV

PRAYER:

Father, help me live boldly for You. Help me have fearless confidence in You and assurance that Your promises are true. In Jesus' name, amen.

What burden do you need to be free from?

Boldness to Believe

BIBLE READING: EPHESIANS 6

The apostle Paul may have had a brilliant mind with an encyclopedia knowledge of God's Word. He may have understood the political climate of the day and had a profound relationship with Jesus. But he also recognized his weaknesses and knew he needed God's help to be a bold witness. This was a spiritual issue, something for which he prayed.

Paul specifically asked others to pray for him to be able to serve God boldly and be a bold witness. He was not just asking for assurance to speak the right words; he was asking for *discernment*, so he could deliver these words in the right spirit and with the maximum impact.

He knew even the most mature believers need a deeper faith to speak with conviction, to be bold and not tentative, to be confident and not halfhearted, and to be articulate and speak with clarity.

He would urge each of us to pray for this kind of boldness. We are to share our testimony with conviction, be free from doubts or worries, and be sure in our relationship with Jesus. Be free from the weight of sin, free from uncertainty, and free to let the Spirit flow through your life.

Today, ask God to free you from sin and anything that displeases Him. Ask Him to fill you anew with His Spirit so that you might be overwhelmed with the Spirit. Speak with authority, anointing, and confidence in Him, standing on His promises.

Loyalty

BIBLE READING: PROVERBS 17

For many, the sight of Doberman Pinschers strikes fear. But to their owners, these dogs are known to be loyal and faithful. The breed derives its name from Louis Dobermann who was determined to breed dogs that could serve as night watchmen and alert him to danger.

These dogs also were bred to be rugged and intelligent and to have extraordinary smelling capabilities. They had unusual endurance and could travel long distances in a short amount of time.

These dogs have proven their value in countless police and military operations throughout the world. They make ideal guard dogs and are assets in search and rescue operations. They have developed the nickname of Velcro dogs because they *stick* to their owners.

Loyalty can be bred into dogs but is difficult to develop in people. As the Bible says, "*Many will say they are loyal friends, but who can find one who is truly reliable?*" (Proverbs 20:6)

Being loyal means being faithful, keeping promises, being dependable through all situations, and putting aside selfish interests.

The Bible teaches that God looks for people who are loyal and seek first His Kingdom, who will die to self, take up their cross daily, and follow Jesus. Be totally committed to serving Him.

Ask God to help you be *loyal* in your relationships—to Him and to friends, family, and other believers as well as people in the community. Be committed and faithful.

How would you rate your level of loyalty?

A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need.

Proverbs 17:17 NLT

PRAYER:

Father, search my heart. Help me to be dependable and faithful. I seek first Your Kingdom. In Jesus' name, amen.

The king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who spoke to David, saying, “You shall not come in here; but the blind and the lame will repel you”... Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion.

2 Samuel 5:6–7 NKJV

PRAYER:

Father, nothing is impossible for You. I commit this situation to You: _____. I seek Your favor and blessing. Thank You for victory. In Jesus’ name, amen.

What stronghold are you trying to tear down today?

Faith into Action

BIBLE READING: 2 SAMUEL 5

Although the Israelites had occupied the Promised Land for many years, they had not been able to capture Jerusalem. This must have looked like an impossible task. It had imposing walls and seemed easy to defend. Everyone who attempted this task had failed.

Confident that they were secure, the people of Jerusalem were not concerned by David’s threats. To them, he looked like just another adventurer who was destined to fail. They were so confident that they boasted that even the blind and lame could repel his attacks. Yet, David achieved the impossible and “took the stronghold of Zion.”

How had he succeeded when so many others failed? He was determined and dedicated. He and his men displayed ingenuity and creativity in their strategy and tactics. Also, they depended on God. They had faith and believed in Him for success.

You may be facing challenges that seem impossible. Others may have failed. You may feel discouraged and overwhelmed by the obstacles. But the Bible *promises* that *anything* is possible with God for those who believe.

Do not be intimidated by doubt or the boasts of other people. Follow David’s example. Be determined to succeed in the tasks God gives you. Ask Him for the strategies and resources that will lead to success. Look for creative solutions to problems. And commit every task to God, seeking His blessings. Believe Him for success.

Precious Relationship

BIBLE READING: SONG OF SOLOMON 2

An excellent musician, Charles Fry and his sons formed the first Salvation Army brass band. He also composed music that demonstrated his faith and what Jesus meant to him.

In 1881, Fry wrote a hymn that told of the intimate relationship he had with Jesus: “I have found a friend in Jesus, He’s everything to me, He’s the fairest of ten thousand to my soul; the Lily of the Valley, in Him alone I see.”

Jesus was all he needed “to cleanse and make me fully whole. In sorrow He’s my comfort, in trouble, He’s my stay; He tells me every care on Him to roll.” He took away his grief and was his “strong and mighty tower” when he faced temptation.

Jesus “will never, never leave me, nor yet forsake me here, while I live by faith and do His blessed will.” With Jesus, he had protection: “A wall of fire about me, I’ve nothing now to fear.” And Jesus would feed his “hungry soul.”

Do you have this kind of intimate relationship with Jesus? He loves you and longs to have this kind of intimate relationship with you. He is with you right now and wants to walk with you through the challenges you face. He wants to speak to you, guide you, and give you more of His wisdom. Make it your prayer to know Jesus better and deeper each day.

Describe your relationship with Jesus.

I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons.

Song of Solomon 2:1–3 KJV

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, thank You that You are my friend. You are everything to me. I seek to have a more intimate relationship with You. In Your name, amen.

Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.

Isaiah 45:22 KJV

Pray for Breakthrough

BIBLE READING: ISAIAH 45

When Charles Spurgeon was a child, his family regularly gathered to read and discuss the Bible. But when he was a teen, he rebelled and struggled against God. His mother kept praying for him. Gradually, Spurgeon began to struggle with his sin. He realized he was rebelling against God and began to feel conviction. He cried to God but could not seem to get victory.

But one Sunday in 1850, a snowstorm prevented him from reaching the church he planned to attend. Instead, he turned into the Primitive Methodist Chapel. He looked around and only about fifteen people were in attendance.

The text was Isaiah 45. He felt convicted as he heard God’s Word. The pastor was not eloquent, but during the message, he seemed to speak directly to Spurgeon: “Young man, you look very miserable...Look to Jesus Christ! Look! Look! Look! You have nothin’ to do but to look and live.”

Spurgeon responded to this simple word and was saved that day. Everything changed, and he became passionate about his faith. He went on to become one of the greatest preachers of the nineteenth century. Through more than 3,000 sermons, he led thousands of people to faith in Christ.

Do you know someone who needs salvation or who is resisting the call of God? Do not give up on them. He can save your friends and relatives. Keep praying and believing. God is faithful.

Who in your life needs to hear the Gospel message today?

Focus

BIBLE READING: ISAIAH 50

When we do not trust in God completely, we can be shaken by things that happen in our lives, by wars and rumors of war, and by problems in the world around us.

We can be intimidated and paralyzed by fear and doubt. We can become hesitant, fearful, and timid. We can worry about our reputation and what people say or think about us. We also can become easily distracted by the events, people, and circumstances in our lives.

However, when we completely trust in God, everything changes. We have faith to believe that He is standing by our side in every situation. He calms our fears and gives us hope, peace, and security.

Isaiah said that, in every situation, we are to set our faces “like a flint.” This means that we concentrate our whole being on God, His Word, and what He has called us to do. We are not caught up in the things of the world. We are not distracted by thinking about earthly rewards, the praise of other people, or popularity. With this kind of focus, we can have peace and think more clearly about the kingdom of God.

Today, ask God to give you this confidence and focus. Set your face like a flint to know Him and serve Him. Do not be distracted by the things of this world. God will be your help, right now!

What is distracting you today from God’s purpose for your life?

The LORD God will help Me...I have set My face like a flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed. He is near who justifies Me...Surely the LORD God will help Me; who is he who will condemn Me?

Isaiah 50:7-9 NKJV

PRAYER:

Father, I believe You have a plan for my life. I focus on setting my face like a flint to accomplish Your purposes. In Jesus’ name, amen.

He has saved me from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling. And so I walk in the LORD'S presence as I live here on earth! I believed in you, so I said, "I am deeply troubled, LORD."

Psalm 116:8–10 NLT

PRAYER:

Father, I place my trust in You. Other people may disappoint me, but I can depend on You. Thank You for Your faithfulness. In Jesus' name, amen.

What worldly philosophies are you tempted to let control your thinking?

Your Standard

BIBLE READING: PSALM 116

Protagoras was an important Greek philosopher who lived in the fifth century BC. He believed that nothing was absolutely good or bad, true or false, and that each person was the final authority for his decisions and beliefs. He summed this up by saying, "Man is the measure of all things."

Throughout the centuries, many people have assumed that they could measure things based on their own, subjective standards. But the Bible assures us that we cannot base our lives on our human understanding or other people.

The Bible makes it clear that all of us are flawed. God told Jeremiah, "*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?*" But we spend much of our time seeking to fool others. God knows us better than we know ourselves. He searches our hearts and tests our minds (Jeremiah 17:9–10 NKJV).

The psalmist realized that ultimately other people would fall short, but he could depend on God. God saved him from death. When he faced trouble and difficulty, he knew he could pray and cry out to Him.

Today, if you are going through any difficulties, remember that you can place your trust in God. You may make mistakes. Other people may fall short and disappoint you. But you can depend on God! Make Him the measure of all things in your life!

A Disciplined Life

BIBLE READING: 2 THESSALONIANS 3

Paul became a believer after a supernatural encounter with Jesus. Miraculous things took place throughout his ministry. But over time, he focused more on the practical impact of the Christian life.

For example, in writing to the Thessalonians, he stressed the importance of *living a disciplined life*. He discovered that some believers were "*undisciplined*." The Greek word has its roots in the military, referring to the response of soldiers to a commander, and the importance of completing assignments. As believers, we are to recognize God as our authority and obey Him, just as soldiers obey their commander.

Some believers did not have this discipline. Those who weren't disciplined, in effect, were defying God, and being negligent about the gifts He has given them. Instead of putting their resources to use, they were "*doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies*" (v. 11).

Paul's admonition was that these people needed to become disciplined. They should determine the fruit of their lives through their actions and attitudes. They still might be born again, but he commanded and exhorted them "*in the Lord Jesus Christ to work peacefully and eat their own bread*."

Paul knew how easily we can become bored with being disciplined and working hard. He stressed that believers must not grow weary of doing good. In every situation, seek to be disciplined. Be a good steward of the resources God has given you.

How do you combat weariness in doing good things?

If anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life... Now we command and exhort such persons...to work peacefully.

2 Thessalonians 3:10–13
NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I commit my time, talents, and treasures to You. Help me to be faithful and disciplined. May my life be pleasing to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.

John 9:25 ESV

Amazing Grace

BIBLE READING: JOHN 9

When John Newton was only 11, he went to sea with his father. This led to a life as a slave trader. Ultimately, he became captain of his own ship, trading slaves. But he never completely forgot about God.

One day while steering the ship through a violent storm, he cried, “Lord, have mercy upon us.” When they survived, Newton believed God had used the storm to give him a message. He soon left the slave business to become a minister.

He made it a goal to write a new hymn each week. One of these was “Amazing Grace,” which described God’s grace in his life. He recognized he was a wretch, but God saved him. “I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.”

Newton recalled his years at sea and how God saved him through “many dangers, toils and snares.” He realized His grace had brought him “safe thus far.” Looking ahead, he knew that God’s grace would lead him home.

That same grace is available for you no matter what you have done. David wrote, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” He pities those who fear Him, just as “a father has compassion on those who fear him.” He knows our weaknesses and “remembers that we are dust” (Psalm 103:12–14).

Accept the grace God offers. Receive His amazing grace!

Who in your life needs to experience God’s amazing grace today?

Positive and Expectant

BIBLE READING: ROMANS 8

Life is filled with ups and downs. Joys and sorrows. Victories and defeats. Struggles and delays. No matter what we do, we will experience sunshine and storms. We know this because “he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike” (Matthew 5:45). And there is a time for everything, including birth and death (Ecclesiastes 3:2).

We want only good things to happen, but God sees purpose and design in everything. The Bible tells us, “I have created the blacksmith who fans the coals beneath the forge and makes the weapons of destruction. And I have created the armies that destroy” (Isaiah 54:16).

We may have a distinctly human perspective, but God sees everything from the perspective of eternity. And the Bible tells us that for those who love Him and are called according to His purposes, He “causes everything to work together for good.” We may see the short term and temporary. He sees the eternal.

These principles are easy to quote but can be hard to live. We need to be thankful and trusting as we enter every situation. We need to be expectant and positive, not negative or doubting, but filled with faith, not worried but confident.

We can have this confidence if we love God, know He has a call on our lives, and know we are “called according to His purpose.”

Are you going through hard or puzzling circumstances right now?

We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

Romans 8:28 NLT

PRAYER:

Father, I trust in You. I believe Your promises are true for me. I believe everything will work out for good. In Jesus’ name, amen.

I sought the LORD and He answered me, and rescued me from all my fears... This wretched man cried out, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him.

Psalms 34:4–7 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I commit these situations to You: _____. Thank You for delivering me from fear and giving me answers. I trust You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Are you facing a situation with fear currently?

Uncharted Waters

BIBLE READING: PSALM 34

The Portuguese felt it was critical to find a water route to Asia. The problem was getting past Cape Bojador. Located on the western coast of Africa, the cape's Arabic name means Father of Danger. Geographers labeled the waters beyond the cape as the Great Sea of Darkness.

The cliffs along its coast were said to contain a powerful lodestone that pulled out a ship's metal rivets, sinking the vessel. There were stories that ships sailing by the cliffs would be struck with sheets of fire. It also was believed that water beyond the cape was boiling, and ships would be burned by the heat of the sun and water.

But Portugal's Prince Henry the Navigator would not accept excuses. He commissioned a series of voyages to round Cape Bojador. The first fourteen voyages failed. Henry made a radical decision, picking a man with no sailing experience to lead the fifteenth voyage. The man was Gil Eanes, a trusted aide.

Eanes's first voyage failed. Henry ordered him to try again and do whatever was necessary. As they approached the cape, Eanes had to convince the crew to sail on. As they persevered, they discovered that the rumors were not true. The waters were calm.

Fear can have a crippling impact on our lives. But David discovered that God could deliver him from fear and save him "out of all his troubles."

God can deliver *you* from every fear. In every situation, turn to Him, and trust Him.

Just When Convenient?

BIBLE READING: ACTS 24

Felix seemed interested in the Gospel. He "sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ." We do not know the length of this visit or the depth of the discussion. We simply know that Paul "reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come" (v. 25).

But these subjects made Felix uncomfortable, throwing him into fear. He said he would call for Paul at a convenient time for more conversations. In fact, "he sent for him more often and conversed with him" (v. 26). It seems likely that Felix was interested in Paul's message but had other priorities. And he seemed more interested in receiving money from Paul.

Many people are like Felix. They may say they are interested in the Christian faith, but how serious is their interest? They may go to church but treat this more as a social event. They read the Bible, but only when convenient. Their interest often is just a curiosity. They may believe in God but don't spend time developing their relationship with Him.

What is your priority? Focusing on your own interests? Or is Bible reading a priority? Do you embrace passages you find convicting? Do you dig into the Word and make this a central part of your daily schedule? Are you open to the leading of the Spirit?

Today, declare that Jesus is the Lord of your life. Don't put it off.

What are your priorities? Where do you spend your time?

Felix...sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ...Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you." Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him.

Acts 24:24–27 NKJV

PRAYER:

Father, I put everything else aside to serve You and know Your Word. Speak to me. Help me listen and respond. In Jesus' name, amen.

I saw also the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims. . . And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts.

Isaiah 6:1–3 KJV

PRAYER:

Father, You are merciful and mighty. May the whole earth be filled with Your glory. You are holy. In Your name, amen.

Compose a reaction to God's holiness.

Holy, Holy, Holy

BIBLE READING: ISAIAH 6

In 1823, Oxford scholar Reginald Heber was sent to India to serve as Bishop of Calcutta. His time in India proved to be productive. While there, he was the first person to create a book that organized hymns according to the church calendar.

He found himself focusing on hymns that underscored church theology. His hymns made an impact in India and around the world. One hymn, “Holy, Holy, Holy,” expressed Heber’s sense of the holiness of God and the importance of the trinity. He wrote, “Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty! Early in the morning, our song shall rise to Thee.” God is “merciful and mighty!”

Basing his text on this passage from Isaiah, he wrote of saints who adore God, “casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea,” and cherubim and seraphim falling before Him. God is eternal; He “was, and is, and evermore shall be.”

Holiness is important; no sinful person can see God’s glory. Only He is holy. “There is none beside Thee, perfect in power, in love, and purity.” And he wrote that all God’s works shall praise His Name, “in earth, and sky, and sea.”

Today, allow the Spirit of God to fill your heart with wonder and awe. Worship and adore God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. “Holy, holy, holy; merciful and mighty! God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!”

Trustworthy

BIBLE READING: EPHESIANS 6

Little is known of Tychicus, but the Bible makes clear that he loved God, served Paul faithfully, and was completely trustworthy.

We first see him with a group of men who waited for Paul at Troas (Acts 20:4–5). Then Paul wrote about him in his letters to the Ephesians, Colossians, Timothy, and Titus. In each situation, we see how Paul gave Tychicus special assignments and seemed to have no doubt that he could be trusted completely.

For example, Paul sent Tychicus to the Ephesians so they would “know my affairs and how I am doing” (v. 1). Paul had spent more than two years in Ephesus. He cared deeply for these people and gave Tychicus the assignment of bringing comfort to their hearts and letting them know about his ministry.

Tychicus provides a model of the faithful servant. While Paul may have received the attention, his ministry would not have been possible without people like Tychicus.

Today, the body of Christ needs people like Tychicus who are willing to serve. Some are called to full-time ministry, but all of us are called to help support the work of the Gospel, to pray, and to contribute our time, talents, and treasures as God directs us.

Seek to be trustworthy and faithful. In every situation, commit to serving the Lord. Trust Him for success. Don’t care who gets the glory or attention. Seek to advance the Kingdom of God.

How are you serving the body of Christ this week?

Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make all things known to you; whom I have sent to you for this very purpose, that you may know our affairs, and that he may comfort your hearts.

Ephesians 6:21–22 NKJV

PRAYER:

Father, help me to be trustworthy and faithful with the gifts and opportunities You give me. I commit myself to serving You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion. Deliver me...incline thine ear unto me, and save me...thou art my rock and my fortress... For thou art my hope, O LORD God.

Psalm 71:1–5 KJV

PRAYER:

Father, I commit this situation to You: _____. I will not be discouraged but hope in You. Thank You I can trust You. In Jesus' name, amen.

How's your level of hope today?

Hope in God

BIBLE READING: PSALM 71

The feeling of hopelessness dominates the life of many people as if life's problems are monumental and cannot be fixed. This spirit changes the way we look at life. Everything seems dark.

To help understand hopelessness, a major university recently conducted a test among 795 men and women. Their goal was to determine whether feelings of hopefulness were a key to health, and "whether those who lack hope are at higher risk of death."

The test confirmed the relationship between hopelessness and sickness. The death rate among those who said they were not hopeful about the future was three times higher than those who said they had hope.

Do you face a situation that causes you to feel hopeless? The Bible reminds us that we can trust in God to provide the protection and resources we need. We have an eternal hope because of what Jesus did for us.

The Bible encourages us not to give in to hopelessness but to focus on God. Stand on His Word. Call on Him, recognizing that He wants to deliver us and be our rock. He provides us with an anchor and stability. Jesus came to die for us, to give us eternal life.

Don't allow your heart to be dominated by hopelessness. Turn to God with praise. Commit your needs to Him. Confess the promises in His Word. Trust Him. Place your hope in Him.

Be Still and Rest

BIBLE READING: PSALM 37

How do we react to problems? With worry or fear? Looking at the lives of other people, we can be filled with envy. We can "fret about their wicked schemes" and feel we need to avenge ourselves.

But the Bible tells us that God wants us to make Him the focus of our lives and be still in His presence. Instead of being in a hurry to act, He wants us to "wait patiently for Him to act." We can only have rest and peace if we unconditionally wait on and have confidence in Him. If we decide to act as judges ourselves, we will end up fretting. This will lead only to doing evil.

God wants us to realize that our path to blessing starts when we wait on Him. Learn not to be upset when others appear to prosper. We need to maintain our own joy in the Lord and be confident in His ability to care for us and guide us. He will take care of the world and others.

Today, remember that you are in God's presence. Commit every situation you face to Him. Remember that He is in control. Do not allow anxiety and worry to fill your heart. Do not be angry or worry, and don't envy those who are prosperous. You can trust God, commit your way to Him, and give Him your burdens. Let Him give you His peace.

How can you plan to be still before the Lord today?

Be still in the presence of the LORD, and wait patiently for him to act. Don't worry about evil people who prosper or fret about their wicked schemes...Do not lose your temper...those who trust in the LORD will possess the land.

Psalm 37:7–9 NLT

PRAYER:

Father, forgive me for being anxious and envying others. I still my heart before You. I believe You will take care of every problem. In Jesus' name, amen.



Trusting the Unseen God

Whether life is easy or hard for you at the moment, He is worthy of your surrender, obedience, and praise.

Although you might have high aspirations, you can be confident that the Lord has even better plans: *“Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think”* (Ephesians 3:20 NLT).

You never have to worry about whether it's safe to trust and obey God. It is safe. Deuteronomy 33:27 promises, *“The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms (NKJV).”* Isn't that a beautiful description of the security and peace you can experience when you've put your life in

the Lord's hands and His *“everlasting arms”*? Some days you may feel like a tightrope walker, gingerly trying to maintain your balance. But you can be confident that the Lord is your faithful net, always ready to catch you if you fall.

The more you surrender your life to God, the more you will discover the depth of His love and faithfulness. So go ahead and give Him everything you own, everything you enjoy, everyone you love, and everything you ever wanted out of life. Then watch as He miraculously transforms your heart and replaces your dreams with

His dreams...your hopes with His hopes...your vision with His vision.

How was Jesus able to so fully surrender His life to the Father's plan? First Peter 2:23 (NASB) says the secret was an issue of trust, for He *“kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.”* So when we suffer persecution or trials, trust can be our key to victory as well: *“Let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good”* (1 Peter 4:19 ESV).

Notice that Peter says it is possible to *“suffer according to God's will.”* This means you shouldn't automatically think you've missed God's will just because you find yourself in a difficult situation. Not only Jesus, but also all of the Bible's greatest heroes experienced times of trial and tribulation. So will you! In fact, Paul writes that *“ALL who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution”* (2 Timothy 3:12 NKJV).

So your surrender to the Lord must be based on more than the hope of receiving His blessings and an easy life. Whether life is easy or hard for you at the moment, He is worthy of your surrender, obedience, and praise. He has promised to be with you, even in dark days when you're walking through *“the valley of the shadow of death”* (Psalm 23:4 NKJV).

Trust Him! When you do, you'll discover as Paul did, *“Whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame”* (Romans 10:11 NASB). ❖

Scriptures to meditate on this month:



Week One

For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

Matthew 16:25 NKJV



Week Two

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Galatians 2:20 NKJV



Week Three

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

James 4:7 NKJV

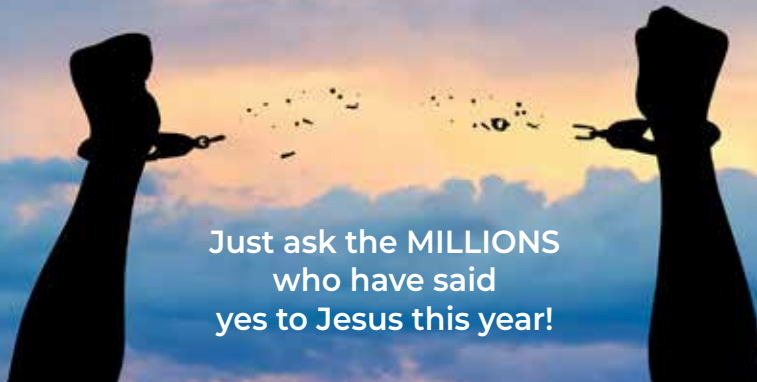


Week Four

O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.

Jeremiah 10:23

The Truth Will Set You Free



Just ask the MILLIONS who have said yes to Jesus this year!

Jesus said that the way to know truth—and freedom—is obedience to His teachings (John 8:32)! Because you have faithfully honored His commands to take the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth, MILLIONS are flourishing in the freedom they've found in Christ.

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A Merry Heart...

does good, like medicine. – Proverbs 17:22

CHURCH BLOOPERS

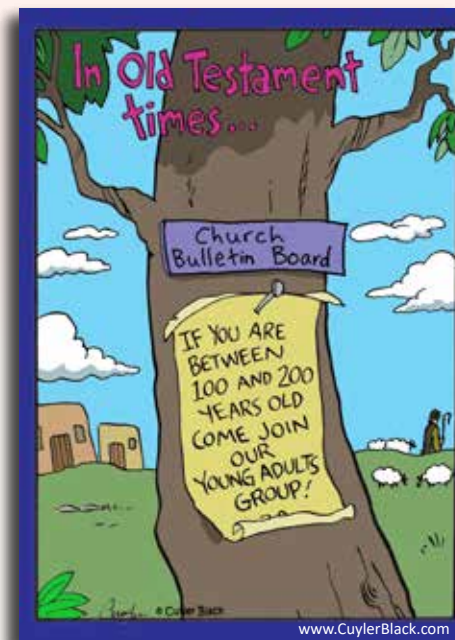
proofreading required!

Church office will be closed Monday. Halleluia. Halleluia.

This being Easter Sunday, we will ask Mrs. Lewis to come forward and lay an egg on the altar.

Mr. Bradford was elected and has accepted the office of head deacon. We could not get a better man.

The Over 60s Choir will be disbanded for the summer with the thanks of the entire church.



A bean supper will be held on Tuesday evening in the church hall. Music will follow.

The outreach committee has enlisted 25 visitors to make calls on people who are not afflicted with any church.

The church will host an evening of fine dining, super entertainment, and gracious hostility.

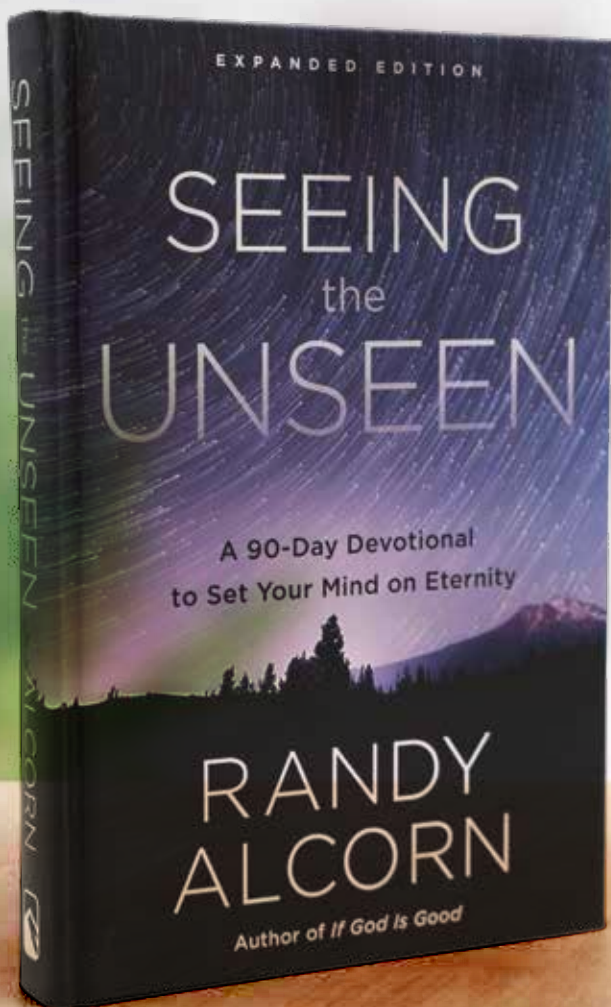
Got some clean, Christian humor you'd like to share?
Email it to: MerryHeart@inspiration.org

Ushers will eat latecomers.



Open Your Eyes to Eternity...

From the author of the bestselling book *Heaven* are 90 meditations that will inspire you to live each day with an eternal perspective. Sin has blinded us to the truth about God and Heaven, both of which are real yet unseen.



But just as the physically blind must accept by faith that there are stars in the sky, we must remind ourselves of what Scripture tells us about eternal realities.

In daily doses, author Randy Alcorn offers insights on the Christian life along with Scriptures and inspirational quotes that will transform the way you think and live. It's time to open your eyes and see the unseen.

*See page 28 for details,
and act quickly—
supplies are limited!*