

SEPTEMBER 2023

# inspiration

M A G A Z I N E



## REST *Assured*

Anything Is  
Possible

Break Every  
Chain

Come to  
Jesus

Rest Assured



Your Father has a special invitation for you this month! Check out David's article on **page 5** where he shares a powerful message on celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles and how to be refreshed in His presence.



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**Turn to page 28** for details about our **THANK YOU GIFT** this month. Act quickly—our supplies are limited.

EDITOR'S CORNER



Rooney Acree

Are you overwhelmed by the cares of life? This month's *INSPIRATION MAGAZINE* contains truths that will energize your faith and bring you into His amazing presence!

The Lord is inviting you to abide with Him during this season of Tabernacles. His gifts of rest and restoration are yours if you'll incline your heart to Him and walk in His ways. If you have a story of His supernatural renewal in your life, please send me a note at [editor@inspiration.org](mailto:editor@inspiration.org). I want to hear!

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*By Ben Cerullo*

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52 Hope for the Future

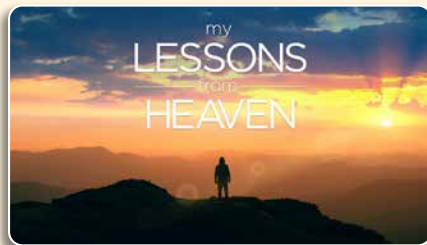
*In Pursuit of God's Promises*

Looking back at God's faithfulness can propel your hope for the future.





**STRENGTHEN**  
*your walk*

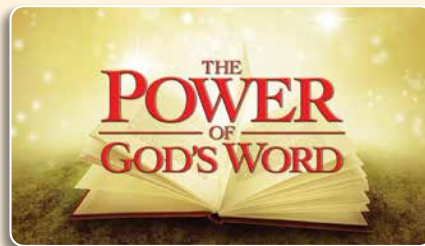


**September 4–  
September 15**

After having a near-death experience in a remote river, Dr. Mary Neal shares how her hope and faith in God's promises were transformed.

**September 18–  
October 13**

David Cerullo explains how your life can be transformed by applying God's promises to your daily life. As you study God's Word, you will be thoroughly equipped "for every good work."



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Your special invitation  
during this month's  
Feast of Tabernacles!

REST  
*Assured*



**STRENGTHEN**  
*your walk*  
with David Cerullo

I meet so many people today who are overwhelmed with the cares of life. Frazzled by the hustle and bustle of their daily obligations, they find themselves completely exhausted and discouraged.

If you are feeling this way today, I have good news! If you need "times of refreshing" from the cares of life, Acts 3:19 tells you exactly where that may be found: in "the presence of the Lord."

The Feast of Tabernacles is designed by the Lord as a time for you to find rest and be refreshed in His presence. It's the third event on God's appointed times calendar, along with the Feast of Passover and the Feast of Pentecost. However, it is actually one of SEVEN feasts listed in Leviticus 23:

- Passover
  - Unleavened Bread
  - Firstfruits
  - Pentecost
  - Trumpets
  - The Day of Atonement
  - Tabernacles
- (the Feast of Weeks)

The fact that Tabernacles is the seventh annual feast has profound significance, especially in light of this introductory statement in God's description of "My feasts" in Leviticus 23:2-3:

*"The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings."*

Before describing the seven feasts His people are to celebrate, it's significant that the Lord reminds us here of the Sabbath principle: There should be six days of work, followed by a day of "solemn rest" when we do no work at all. This was an important pattern originally set by God at the beginning of His creation (Genesis 2:1-3) and then reaffirmed when the Law was given to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:8-11).

And the Israelites knew that something very important occurred prior to every Sabbath as they journeyed through the wilderness. God told them in Exodus 16:

*"Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not. And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily" (vs. 4-5).*

*So they gathered it every morning, every man according to his need. And when the sun became hot, it melted.*

*And so it was, on the sixth day, that they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. And all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. Then he said to them, "This is what the LORD has said: 'Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath*

*to the LORD. Bake what you will bake today, and boil what you will boil; and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning" (vs. 21-23).*

*"See! For the LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day. So the people rested on the seventh day" (vs. 29-30).*

As the seventh feast, Tabernacles becomes linked to the principle of the Sabbath. God's work has already been completed during the other six feasts, and now it is time to rejoice and enter into His rest! A double portion of manna has already been gathered, so there's no more work to do during this time of rest and celebration.

My friend, Jesus extends this beautiful invitation to you in Matthew 11:28-30:

*"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."*

Tabernacles is a wonderful opportunity each year to enter into God's rest. The author of the book of Hebrews tells us:

*There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.*

*Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience (Hebrews 4:9-11).*

Don't let unbelief or disobedience keep you from entering God's rest! It's a precious gift to

**The Sabbath principle: There should be six days of work, followed by a day of "solemn rest" when we do no work at all.**

***"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."***

—Matthew 11:28



you from your Heavenly Father—beautifully depicted in the seventh feast, the Feast of Tabernacles. Exodus 20:11 tells us, “*The LORD BLESSED the Sabbath day and hallowed it,*” and the same is true about how He has blessed the Feast of Tabernacles. As the seventh feast, it is set apart as a special time of blessing and refreshing.

Do you want to find this amazing “*rest for your soul*”? Then the Bible says you need to return to the “*ancient paths,*” my friend:

*“Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls”* (Jeremiah 6:16 NIV).

When you incline your heart to the Lord and walk in His ways, He will give you rest and demonstrate His faithfulness:

*“Blessed be the LORD, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised. There has not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised through His servant Moses. May the LORD our God be with us, as He was with our fathers. May He not leave us nor forsake us, that He may incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His*

*judgments, which He commanded our fathers”* (1 Kings 8:56–58).

Remember, God’s appointed times are part of the “*ancient paths*” He has prepared for you. They are anointed times of blessing, refreshing, and peace. Give Him your best, follow His instructions, and get ready to experience amazing, deep rest for your soul.

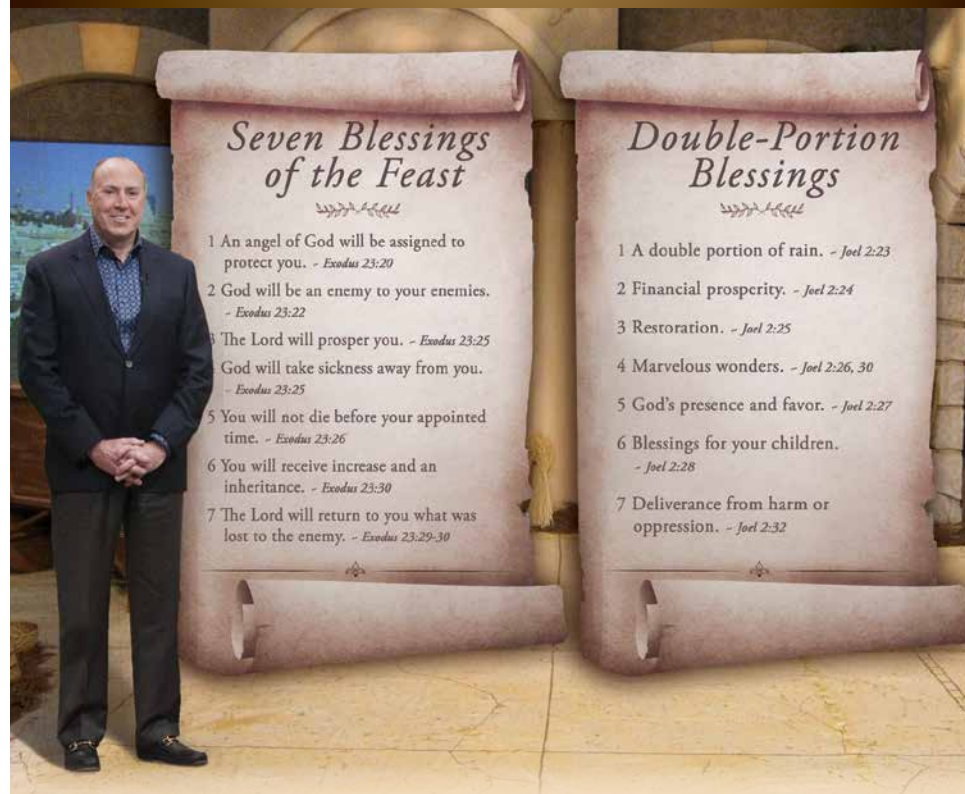
God bless you!

*David*

P.S. I hope you’ll visit [StrengthenYourWalk.org](http://StrengthenYourWalk.org) to sign up for my free daily discipleship videos. And don’t forget to request your copy of my book **2X: Keys to Living a Double-Portion Life** on receiving your double-portion blessings from God (see **page 28** and the enclosed response form). This can be your month to receive extraordinary breakthroughs!



## YOUR FEAST OF TABERNACLES Double-Portion Blessings



As you give your special Feast of Tabernacles offering to the Lord, I encourage you to call upon Him for these incredible promised blessings that are part of YOUR inheritance in Christ.

**As God’s covenant partner, you can trust in Him to fulfill His promises!**



# Anything Is Possible

What happens when the unexplainable runs into the undeniable? We call that a miracle. And the greatest miracle of all time is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The fact that He lives—right this minute—is the miracle of all miracles. And because He rolled away that stone, walked out shining like the sun, and is seated at the right hand of God Most High, then anything is possible.

That means He can walk on water, change water to wine, cast out demons, heal the sick, raise the dead. It also means that if the tomb is empty—and it is—then anything is possible in your life too.

Despite the fact that your news feed, your biology class, and all our modern and postmodern ideologies tell us we're crazy to believe in miracles, you're here. All of us have a tendency to say, "I know He can heal everybody else's marriage, but maybe not mine. I've heard that maybe He's healed

somebody else's cancer, but maybe not mine. I've heard stories that He may have broken the chains of addiction for somebody else, but maybe not mine." Maybe it's pornography, it's an eating disorder, it's, "Why do I care so much about what Instagram says about me?"

What is the miracle you need? Name it. Write it out. Don't be afraid. "*You have not because you ask not*" (James 4:2). So, let's name the need and ask Him. This is not name it and claim it. It's name it and lay it at the feet of Jesus and trust Him. Is it addiction? Cancer? Marriage? Prodigal? What? Maybe you think your problem is too big for Him. He defeated death, hell, and the grave. He can handle whatever you bring Him.

So, let's bring the need and cry out for a miracle. Let us come boldly before His throne of grace asking to receive mercy and grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16). This is our time and here is our need. Lay it out there. Or would you be bold enough to tell someone else? Maybe your discipleship group. Your spouse. Best friend. "Hey,

pray with me about this, will you?"

Remember, Jesus never stuck His finger in the chest of those who came to Him and said, "Nope, not enough faith. Come back when you've mustered up more." That's like saying, "You have to get cleaned up to take a bath." You don't. He took them in whatever condition they came. The point is they came in faith. And the amount of faith they had mattered none to Jesus. Will you come to Him?

The key is faith. Here's what the writer of Hebrews says: "*Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him*" (Hebrews 11:6 ESV). When I read that, my eye focuses on "*draw near*" and "*believe*." And if, unlike Jesus, you are looking inside yourself measuring your own faith and thinking to yourself, "I don't have it," I have good news. "*Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ*" (Romans 10:17 ESV). This means if you don't have it, you can get it. It's simple. Listen. Believe. Do. ❖

*"Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek him."*

Hebrews 11:6 ESV



**Joby Martin** is the founder and lead pastor of the Church of Eleven22 in Jacksonville, Florida. He frequently speaks at conferences around the country and is an active member of the Acts 29 church planting network.

Excerpted from *Anything Is Possible: How Nine Miracles of Jesus Reveal God's Love for You*, used by permission of FaithWords.



# THE PRICE OF FAME



Ted DiBiase, The Million Dollar Man, was one of pro wrestling's best. But there was a price for that fame.

"When I discovered that Ted had been cheating in our marriage, I had to hold it together for my children. The one thing that kept me sane through all of this was my relationship with the Lord."

—Melanie DiBiase in *The Price of Fame*

Watch the trailer at [inspiration.org/trailers](http://inspiration.org/trailers)

Saturday, September 16  
at 3:00 p.m. ET

Program times subject to change. Check [inspiration.org/tv](http://inspiration.org/tv) for details.

There is shelter, protection, and provision in the  
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Saturday, September 23 at 9 p.m. ET  
Sunday, September 24 at 5:30 p.m. ET

### **Sabina K.**

After the Bosnian War, Sabina's fiancé goes missing. As she chooses to protect her unborn child, Christ shines a light in her darkness. Based on a true story.



Tuesday, September 5 at 9 p.m. ET

### **Discarded Things**

As Grace teaches music therapy to at-risk youth, the kids begin growing their God-given talents, while Grace begins healing from wounds of the past.



Saturday, September 9 at 3 p.m. ET

### **The Long Goodbye**

Share Kara's authenticity and humor as she walks through cancer with Jesus in the most enduring testimony a mother could leave for her children. With Ann Voskamp and Joanna Gaines.



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Keys to understanding when God moves.



# What Is REVIVAL?

There's a holy buzz around the word revival these days. From the Asbury Revival to movies like *The Jesus Revolution*, we're seeing a true passion for the fire and Spirit of the Lord.

We all desire God to move in our communities and hearts in ways we've never felt before. But can we say we know what revival really is? Are we guilty of thinking of it in human terms or even worse, trying to make it happen?

Throughout the Old Testament, we see the Israelites trapped in a cycle of sin, celebrating God one day and rejecting Him the next. When things got really bad, a judge or a prophet would admonish them to admit their wrongs and return to the living God.

As soon as they did, God would forgive their sins and restore them to a more vital spiritual life and witness.

Some signs indicate we are on the upside of that same cycle. Today, our country is definitely in moral and spiritual decline, but there are also signs of people returning to the Lord!

When we experience true revival, we experience a spark of new life from God's presence. It's not manufactured by hype or emotion, advertised in the bulletin, or announced in a church meeting. It happens in hearts as the result of the Holy Spirit's working. In every instance, revival is preceded by authentic Bible teaching and prayer:

*If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land (2 Chronicles 7:14).*

## A BRIEF HISTORY:

Like the Israelites, Americans have a record of spiritual declines followed by spiritual renewals. Each one has left an indelible mark on not only our spiritual history, but also our culture.

After the Pilgrims fled England for religious freedom in 1620, they experienced a move of God that lasted over 100 years. Then, in the 1730s, a preacher named Jonathan Edwards gave a series of sermons on salvation by faith alone, and the **First Great Awakening** was born. The revival spread throughout the Colonies for the next several years through powerful preachers such as George Whitfield and the Wesley brothers.

By the early 1800s, the first revival had dwindled. God then raised up Timothy Dwight, president of Yale University and grandson of Jonathan Edwards, whose dynamic preaching ushered in the **Second Great Awakening**.

Nearly half of Yale's students professed Christ as Lord! But it was Charles Finney who propelled this revival and gave it new life in people's hearts throughout the US.

As America became more industrialized and focused on gaining wealth, people began to rely on themselves instead of God. But in 1906, William Seymour brought a powerful message of salvation to Los Angeles and soon news of changed hearts and the Holy Spirit's work in the **Azusa Street Revival** quickly gained steam.

In the mid-1900s, **Billy Graham's** powerful messages called millions to the altar in repentance. In the late 1960s–early 1970s, the **Jesus Movement** erupted in California as a generation of rule-breaking hippies came to Christ. And in pockets around the nation, powerful revivals continue to shape our spiritual heritage.

All these moves of God share a common thread: individual hearts encountering the holiness of God and their desperate need for a forgiving, powerful Savior. This is the revival America needs. This Tabernacles season is the perfect time to pray and ask God for a fresh outpouring of His Spirit on our nation. ❖

Will you join us in praying for a revival in our hearts, homes, churches, and communities throughout America?



# Break Every Chain



Mercedes found freedom from her strongholds...and so can you!

If ever there was a verse that represents Mercedes's life, it's Revelation 21:5. That's the verse Jesus spoke from the throne, declaring, "I am making everything new!" Although the devil sowed generations of destruction into her family line, Jesus crushed that curse forever...and set her free!

"I come from a long line of addicts," Mercedes began. "Mental health issues and drug abuse go hand in hand." In and out of addiction for nearly 20 years, she experienced some of the darkest days of her life.

Her grandparents whisked her out of a dangerous home life when she was a toddler, but addictions raged in their home as well. Whenever Mercedes visited

her mom, her stepfather's sexual abuse compounded the darkness of her world.

But sin cannot stop our God. He led her Jesus-believing grandma to send Mercedes to church where she met the Savior who would one day set her free from the generational bonds of the enemy!

Before those chains could snap in two, however, Mercedes had to deal with her addiction. She was motivated to seek help when she had her first child in 2011, but the treatment program she was in did little to change her heart. When Mercedes returned to the same world of darkness, she couldn't cope.

Faced with her stepfather's continued sexual advances, Mercedes

cried out to her mom, "Why can't he love me like his own kids?" Her callous reply, "It wasn't in the cards for you," was too much. Mercedes pulled out a gun to kill him—but her mom's screams made her run. The chains that had held her for so long finally began to fall.

She found herself at an addiction recovery program called Isaiah House where she began to find the hope of Jesus.

"At Isaiah House, we use the AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) program. I think working the steps helped wake up my spirit. Some friends invited me to go to church with them, and it was different than anything I'd ever experienced. I felt God's presence like never before."

Mercedes's voice softened as she described her first real encounter with Jesus. "It was the most amazing feeling I'd ever felt. There was just overwhelming peace. I've not been the same since!"

Set free for a year now, Mercedes lives in a sober-living facility where she has pursued

training as a Certified Peer Support Specialist. Her desire is to nurture the spiritual lives of others at the facility, so she began searching the internet for resources. That's where she found articles and devotions at **inspiration.org**. "I am so thankful to find resources to help me—and help me help others," she explained.

"God has shown me that my hard times are not without purpose. He was there all along, and now I can be there for other women. I want them to know that God can break generational curses. He does convict me of sin, but He never condemns me. And He is not vengeful."

Today, Mercedes lives in Kentucky and had the joy of being part of the Asbury University Revival. She's still working through forgiveness and continues to take her sin to the altar. "God gave me peace, and I'll keep seeking Him. I know I must remain sober minded and vigilant," she said. "Life is wonderful. His promises just keep coming true for me." ❖

**What God has done for Mercedes,  
He can do for you!**

As you sow your seeds, ask Him to give you  
the breakthrough you need!

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**[inspiration.org/souls](https://www.inspiration.org/souls)**



**God so loved the world**  
that he gave his one and only  
Son, that whoever believes  
in him shall not perish  
but have eternal life.

John 3:16 NIV

Already this year, more than  
**3.9 Million people**  
have responded to the salvation message  
presented by Inspiration Ministries.

## 5.1 MILLION Souls in 2023

### SOWING CONSISTENTLY REAPS A HARVEST

Inspiration Ministries is putting this principle into practice as THOUSANDS of souls say “YES” to Christ every month through our ministry outreaches—**more than 5 million people in 2022!** People in **over 200 nations** have said they have given their heart to Jesus through this ministry, and someone is now declaring Jesus as Lord **every 6 seconds or less** around the world.

Through your consistent, monthly seeds for souls, YOU are participating in this great harvest.

Please continue to spread the good news of wonderful love through Jesus! Contact us to sow your seed today:

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“I’m a living  
testimony that our  
God is the true  
and living God.  
He is my Jehovah  
Jireh. I’ve learned  
that Jesus is able to  
meet every need!”  
— Diana, Georgia



## Seeking His Presence

BIBLE READING: PSALM 84

Johannes Brahms struggled to find the right words for the music he was writing. Then in February 1865, he received news that his mother was dying. Devastated, he could not reach her before she passed away.

Her death impacted Brahms in dramatic ways. Struggling with depression, he turned to the music he had been trying to finish. Although not a religious person, he found inspiration in the Bible, and the piece became his *German Requiem*. The first full performance took place on Good Friday 1868 at the Bremen Cathedral (in what today is western Germany). It was a resounding success.

The most moving moment was the fourth movement, “How Lovely Are Thy Dwellings.” This text inspired by Psalm 84 describes how wonderful it is to come into God’s presence where we find peace and rest. In his own way, Brahms invited listeners to focus on God. (This movement is often performed separately.)

One of the powerful things about this and other psalms is that they provide ways to express our deepest feelings. They can bring comfort when we need encouragement. Even a non-religious person like Brahms realized that he needed to focus on God, then he would find everything he needed in His presence.

Remember that God is with you. You can call on Him for *whatever* you need. Seek to enter His presence. Let Him take away every burden and worry. Worship Him.

Write out the lyrics to your favorite worship song.

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FRIDAY

September

1

*How lovely is Your  
tabernacle... My soul  
longs... for the courts of  
the LORD; my heart and  
my flesh cry out for the  
living God [...] Blessed  
are those who dwell in  
Your house; they will  
still be praising You.*

Psalm 84:1-2, 4

### PRAYER:

Father, I long to be in Your presence. Fill me anew with Your Spirit. Give me Your peace. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Abundant Provision

BIBLE READING: JAMES 4

Annie Johnson Flint experienced many difficulties. Her mother died when Annie was just three. Her father suffered from an incurable disease. She spent years under the care of adopted parents, but both died when she was still young. Flint suffered from arthritis, which eventually made it difficult for her to walk.

Despite these challenges, Flint found joy in her relationship with Jesus. She committed her life to Him during a revival meeting when she was just eight. After that commitment, she never wavered in her faith, trusting Him through every circumstance.

She expressed her faith in many poems. One of her most beloved poems was “He Giveth More Grace.” Her words later became a powerful hymn. She wrote how she discovered that God gives more grace “as our burdens grow greater.” He sends “more strength as our labors increase.” As we go through difficulties, “He multiplies peace.”

In moments of weakness, we might feel reluctant to ask God for more or pray again. But Annie realized God has *no limits*. She learned, “His grace has no measure.” His power has no boundary. We can continue to turn to Him no matter what we received in the past.

Today, trust in God for everything you need. Don’t hesitate to call on Him. Remember that His supply is unlimited.

*But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”*

James 4:6

### PRAYER:

Father, thank You that there is no limit to Your love. I trust in You and look to You for everything I need. In Jesus’ name, amen.

What do you need God to provide right now?

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## Bringing in the Sheaves

BIBLE READING: PSALM 126

When Knowles Shaw was nine or ten, his dying father gave him his cherished violin and encouraged him to live for the Lord. Inspired by his father’s influence, Knowles grew up to be an evangelist and composer. “Bringing in the Sheaves” was one of the last songs he wrote.

This hymn invites us to think about a wheat harvest. Workers would go into the field first sowing the seed and then, when the time was right, harvesting the wheat and bundling the stalks.

For Shaw, this provided imagery for sharing the Gospel. The harvested wheat is a picture of the souls who have been saved. The goal of believers is to share the Gospel, sowing the seeds so that souls will be ready for the great harvest.

This message applies to each of us. We are called to sow seeds of the Gospel throughout our lives, share our testimony, pray for others, and give financially out of what God has given us.

If we are faithful, we will reap a harvest and “come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.” What joy there will be as we see the fruit of our labors and witness the souls we have impacted.

You have a role to play. Sow seeds from the reservoir God has given you. Share the Gospel that souls will be saved. Join with the saints throughout history—rejoicing, rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.

When have you seen a harvest from the seeds you have planted?

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*He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.*

Psalm 126:6

### PRAYER:

Father, open my eyes to see souls who need the Gospel. Give me a hunger to spread this Good News. In Jesus’ name, amen.



*I am writing to Timothy, my true son in the faith. May God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord give you grace, mercy, and peace.*

1 Timothy 1:2 NLT

**PRAYER:**

Father, help me to be a good example for others. Reveal more insights from Your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.

To whom can you be a role model this week?

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# A Great Teacher

BIBLE READING: 1 TIMOTHY 1

The Greek philosopher Socrates is considered a great teacher. What distinguished him was a unique approach often called the Socratic method. This involved a dialogue between teachers and students in which the teacher asked a series of questions, seeking to draw out deeper understanding from pupils. The goal was to encourage students to think, to explain their conclusions, and to develop critical thinking skills.

We also know that the apostle Paul was a great teacher. We see his technique in the letter he wrote to his young friend Timothy, whom Paul considered his “beloved and faithful child in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 4:17). He was a trusted emissary and a man who could teach others how to follow Jesus. Timothy needed to learn essential truths.

Paul’s letter to Timothy is filled with instructions: how to approach the task of ministry; how to determine his focus; how to interact with other believers; insights into the correct understanding of spiritual truths; how to deal with disputes; and how to choose church leaders.

Paul was establishing a model for us. All of us should have a concern for the next generation, seeking to be good examples for men and women who are growing in their faith. We should model the kind of lives they should live, encourage them with the Word, and make them more effective believers.

# Distractions

BIBLE READING: 1 TIMOTHY 1

Timothy might have had other desires, but Paul directed him to stay at Ephesus until his mission was *completed*. The task? To identify any mistaken assumptions made by believers. He was to make sure they were on course, learning correct doctrines, and knowing *what* they believed.

Paul knew how easily false doctrines could spread and become accepted. Recognizing this danger, Timothy was to deliver his message *forcefully*.

Timothy was encouraged to realize that some believers had become distracted. They were wasting time pursuing subjects that were not fruitful. Many of them spent too much time in debates, disputes, and arguments. Paul specifically wanted Timothy to instruct them not to “*pay attention to myths and endless genealogies*” and avoid gossip and speculation.

Timothy was to have the right priorities and encourage believers to focus on living for God. They were to make Jesus their Lord and Savior, have effective prayer lives, avoid distractions, and fill their minds with God’s Word.

These characteristics still are central to being used by God. He calls us to know His Word and be certain of what we believe. We are to let Him direct our paths and make sure our hearts are pure, so we have a “*good conscience*,” serve Him, and stay focused on the tasks to which we are called.

How can you learn to focus on Jesus and ignore the distractions?

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*Remain on at Ephesus...instruct certain people not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies...The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from a sincere faith.*

1 Timothy 1:3–5 NASB

**PRAYER:**

Father, keep me from being sidetracked with distracting issues. Help me focus on the Gospel. Direct my thoughts. In Jesus' name, amen.

*I thank Christ Jesus our Lord...He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was previously a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief.*

1 Timothy 1:12–13 NASB

**PRAYER:**

Father, thank You for changing me. Use me to impact others for Your Kingdom. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Our Past

BIBLE READING: 1 TIMOTHY 1

Paul was a model believer: devout, zealous, and a defender of the faith. Yet looking back, Paul realized he had been a “blasphemer,” and before he knew Christ, he had been seeking to persecute His followers. But he came to realize that God could use his past and even his mistakes to spread the Gospel.

He thought about people like Hymenaeus and Alexander who had “suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.” Concerned for their spiritual condition, Paul handed them “over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme” (vs. 19–20).

Drawing on his own experience, Paul knew these men needed a wake-up call. He had been an example for others, and there was much these two men needed to learn. If they were “handed over to Satan,” they might see their actions in a new light and be jarred into reconsidering what they had done, turning to God more sincerely.

Paul demonstrated an important principle: God uses our lives to accomplish His purposes. What we have learned and done, even our mistakes, are things we can share with conviction. The things we *know* through our own experience—not theories but reality—can help others learn, confront their problems, and change.

God can use *your* past to impact others. Be sensitive to His Spirit, so He can use you and everything you have done.

What part(s) of your story can you share to impact others?

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## Love So Abundant

BIBLE READING: 1 TIMOTHY 1

Like many Americans in the nineteenth century, Grant Colfax Tullar’s life was impacted by the American Civil War. His father was wounded in the Battle of Antietam and was unable to work. While Tullar was a child, his mother died, leading to the split-up of the family. In his youth, he worked in a woolen mill and as a shoe clerk but received no education or training. Tullar had no settled home until he became an adult.

A turning point came at 19 when he came to Christ at a camp meeting. Dedicating his life to Jesus, he became an ordained minister and then a full-time evangelist. Music became increasingly central to his life, and he cofounded a publishing company that published many hymns he wrote.

One hymn was particularly autobiographical. “Love So Abundant” described his gratitude that Jesus changed his life. He had “purchased my pardon, setting me free.” This was an expression of “love so abundant.” In response, “Should I not serve Him, when He so gladly suffered for me?”

It was a joy just to know Jesus. He was his Savior and guarded his footsteps. He was confident Jesus would lead him “out of the darkness into the day.” With Jesus as his “constant companion” and refuge, he felt safe no matter what happened.

Remember that Jesus is with you. He is by your side, right now. He loves you.

What part does music play in your personal worship time?

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*The grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.*

1 Timothy 1:14

**PRAYER:**

Father, thank You for loving me. Thank You for being my constant companion. I trust my life to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

*Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all.*

Luke 18:17 NASB

### PRAYER:

Father, I believe Your Word is true. I trust You. Thank You that You are faithful. I love You! In Jesus' name, amen.

What doubts are keeping you from trusting God fully?

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## Simple Faith

BIBLE READING: LUKE 18

Antonin Dvorák was a beloved composer. Born on this day in 1841, in what today is the Czech Republic, his most famous work was his *New World Symphony*, written during the three years he spent in the United States.

Dvorák had a genial nature. As one musicologist notes, he was a “devoutly religious” man. His faith in God was “unquestioning” and “all pervasive.” He simply *believed* and trusted Him. His faith sustained him, particularly when he went through difficulties and was criticized. His belief in God gave his music warmth and left listeners uplifted and encouraged.

But the simplicity of his faith did not limit his creativity. These characteristics infused his music with boldness. It allowed him great *freedom* because he believed that he wrote “what God tells me to do.”

Many people argue that it is foolish to have faith in God and naïve to trust in Him and believe His Word. But in God's sight, this childlike faith *opens the door to blessings* and spiritual riches. Jesus said that we cannot even *enter* God's Kingdom unless we approach it like a child.

Are you allowing doubt to keep you from trusting in God? Have you given in to skeptics who question His Word? Put aside the opinions of foolish human beings. Approach God and His Word just like a child. Believe Him. Trust Him. Simply have faith.

## A Good Conscience

BIBLE READING: 1 TIMOTHY 1

Born in the Netherlands, Simon de Vlieger achieved fame as a painter of landscapes. He often painted ships in a harbor, highlighting his sensitivity to the constantly changing weather along the Netherlands' coast.

One of his most important paintings was *Estuary at Dawn*, which today hangs in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. This is a painting of contrasts. On one hand in the foreground, we see the impact of a violent storm. At the same time, the overall scene is a picture of serenity; all is calm.

A scene like this celebrated the harmony of people within the natural world who prospered because of God's blessing.

Vlieger's painting of ships at sea reminds us of Paul's point that “*some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith*,” and we are to fight the good fight, live by faith, and keep a clear conscience.

A shipwreck is an apt way to describe what can happen to believers. This implies some kind of accident—perhaps striking rocks in the water, running aground, or being caught up in a storm.

As Paul reminds us, the way to avoid spiritual shipwrecks is to maintain a “*good conscience*.” We do this when we live in harmony with God, stay in tune with His Spirit, act in ways consistent with His Word, let Him alert us to any dangers, and trust in Him.

How can you avoid a spiritual shipwreck?

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*Fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.*

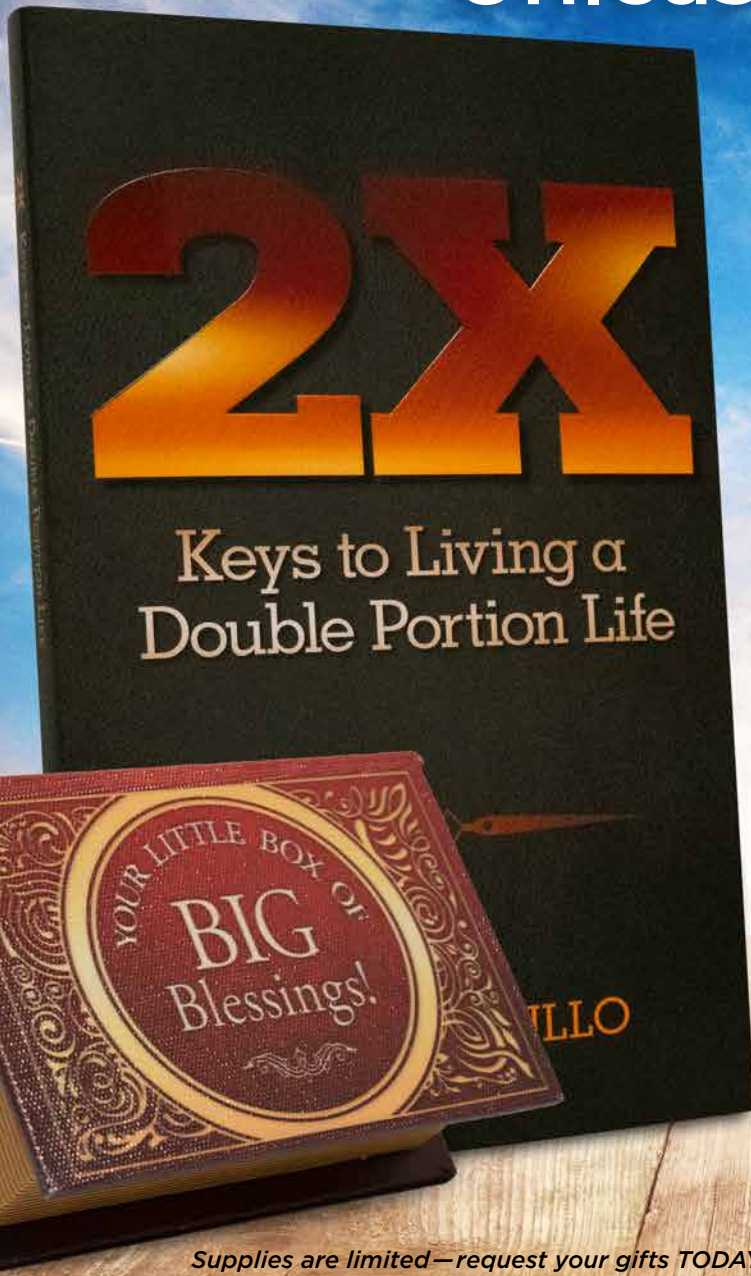
1 Timothy 1:18–19 NASB

### PRAYER:

Father, I commit these issues to You: \_\_\_\_\_. Give me Your peace. I trust in You. In Jesus' name, amen.



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*I urge that requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made in behalf of all people, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.*

1 Timothy 2:1–2 NASB

**PRAYER:**

Father, show me people for whom I should be praying. Reveal their specific needs. Use me in their lives. In Jesus' name, amen.

Compose an individualized prayer for someone.

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# Models of Prayer

BIBLE READING: 1 TIMOTHY 2

In simple terms, Paul instructed us to pray for all people, including those in authority. But he also provided four different approaches to prayer.

First, we are to make *requests*. This requires that we *know* people and what they need, care enough about them to seek God on their behalf, and be sensitive to the issues they face.

Second, we are to offer *prayers*. The Greek word here implies not just the activity of prayer but also the *place* of prayer, finding a place where we can concentrate and spend quality time seeking God for these people and their needs.

Third, we are to make *intercession* for others. This implies that we approach God on their behalf, meeting with Him, like an interview, talking about the needs and problems people are facing.

Fourth, we are to pray with a spirit of *thankfulness* for the people about whom we are praying and the opportunity to pray for them. It can be easy to be critical, but a spirit of thankfulness can change our attitude. Prayer out of thankful hearts can impact us as much as it impacts the ones we pray for.

Ask God to give you discernment about the people for whom He wants you to pray. Ask Him about their specific needs and how you should pray. Find a place where you can concentrate and, with a thankful heart, pray the things He wants you to pray about.

# Trapped

BIBLE READING: 1 TIMOTHY 3

The European armies faced the Mongol Horde near the modern German-Polish border in April 1241. The Mongols repulsed the first charge of the European cavalry, but after a second charge, the Mongols seemed to flee in fear. Sensing an opportunity, the Europeans chased the Mongols. It seemed like a moment of triumph.

Little did they know that they had been trapped. As one historian described, the Europeans had become *overconfident*. They found themselves “spread out, disorganized, confused, and tiring quickly.” The shrewd Mongols then decimated them.

Many armies over time have fallen into similar traps. But traps are sprung in all of life, even in our spiritual lives. *Anyone* can be snared, not just novices, but also experienced veterans.

Paul knew how easily we can be trapped— attracted into forming wrong relationships or misled into following deceptive paths. We can fail to heed warnings and suffer the consequences.

Be careful not to be overconfident. Realize that Satan is looking for ways to capture your thoughts and cause you to doubt God and His Word. He wants to lure you to watch programs or films filled with corruption, hear arguments that can hijack your heart, or become addicted to lifestyles that lead you away from God.

How can you be ready? Know God's Word. Pray about any questionable activity. Stay sensitive to His Spirit. Ask God to help you avoid the traps awaiting *you!*

In what areas are you susceptible to falling into Satan's traps?

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*He must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil.*

1 Timothy 3:7 NASB

**PRAYER:**

Father, give me discernment. Show me where I am vulnerable. Help me to stay strong in You and be ready for attacks. In Jesus' name, amen.



*The Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared.*

1 Timothy 4:1–2 ESV

### PRAYER:

Father, help me be ready for deception. Give me discernment. Help me overcome. In Jesus' name, amen.

How can you become more discerning to combat deception?

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## Deceitful Spirits

BIBLE READING: 1 TIMOTHY 4

It was a critical trend, threatening to shake the commitment of believers. Paul wanted to be sure Timothy was on the alert. To stress its importance, he added the word *expressly*. What was so important? *“In later times some will depart from the faith.”*

Paul warned that people will be deceived into deserting the Christian faith, turning their back on the Savior, and forsaking beliefs they once had.

Instead of believing the Bible and trusting God, they devoted themselves to *deceitful* spirits. These forces misled others so effectively that they would convince Christians to forsake the truth and believe lies.

Paul warned that some Christians would depart from the truth by devoting themselves to the *“teachings of demons.”* These believers would be deceived with misleading information from insincere people, *“liars whose consciences are seared.”*

These trends continue in our time. Even today, some depart from the faith and yield their minds and hearts to the influence of *“deceitful spirits,”* embracing misinformation spread by Satanic forces.

This is what the Spirit *expressly* said would happen. We need to be careful and sure of what we believe. Be prepared for people who would mislead and deceive us. Be alert and ready.

## Jesus, Think on Me

BIBLE READING: 1 TIMOTHY 4

Around the year 373 AD, a man named Synesius was born near the North African city of Cyrene. Called the “last great citizen” of this city, he was wealthy and traced his ancestry to the kings of Sparta in ancient Greece. After becoming a Christian, he rose to the position of bishop. Some may have disagreed with some of his opinions, but everyone recognized his outstanding character.

Sometime in the early fifth century, he wrote a hymn called “Lord Jesus, Think on Me.” In the translation provided by Allen Chatfield, we read how Synesius sought to live a *pure* life. He wrote, “Lord Jesus, think on me and purge away my sin.” His prayer was that Jesus would set him free from earthborn passions, so he might be pure within.

He prayed that Jesus would help him be His “loving servant” and taste His promised rest. He knew he was involved in a spiritual conflict. But he wanted Jesus to be his “health and life.” He prayed He would keep him from going astray and that “through darkness and perplexity” point him to the right way to live. Even while delighting in His presence, Synesius looked forward to seeing Jesus face to face.

Today, turn *your heart* toward Jesus. Seek His purity. Seek to be purged from any habits, thoughts, or relationships that pollute your heart and mind. Dedicate your life to serving Him.

What habits and thoughts do you need to get rid of?

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*Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.*

1 Timothy 4:12 NASB

### PRAYER:

Jesus, help me please You with my life. Purge me of sin and impurities. Guide me. I dedicate all I have to You. In Your name, amen.



*Anyone who teaches anything different...is simply ignorant...with a craze for questioning everything and arguing about words. All that can come of this is jealousy, contention, abuse, and wicked mistrust of one another; and unending disputes.*

1 Timothy 6:3-5 TJB

## Patient, Not Arguing

BIBLE READING: 1 TIMOTHY 6

Paul warned Timothy to be aware of problems he might encounter in his ministry and interpersonal relationships. He would discover that some people simply love to *argue* and cause problems. Instead of building others up and focusing on the Gospel, they engage in “*unending disputes*” and have “*a craze for questioning everything*.”

They may think they have good intentions, but Paul said their approach is the result of jealousy and “*wicked mistrust of one another*.” They stir up controversy in ways that disrupt the unity of the body of Christ, split relationships, and weaken our testimony.

God’s people are to cultivate an attitude of *humility*, realizing that “*we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it*” (v. 7). Instead of arguing and looking for reasons for disputes, we are to be gentle and patient, with a desire to be *content*.

We should not be driven by selfish gain but have the attitude of a *servant*. We are not to be argumentative but should be motivated out of love. We’re to be instruments of healing and reconciliation, always pointing people to Jesus.

Don’t be caught up in selfish pursuits or dominated by a doubting, divisive spirit. Always seek first the Kingdom of God. Don’t seek to tear others down with arguments but be an instrument of peace and forgiveness.

What action steps can you take to cultivate a spirit of humility this week?

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## New Beginnings

BIBLE READING: LEVITICUS 23

Today at sundown begins the celebration of *Rosh Hashanah*, the start of the Jewish year. This inaugurates a 10-day period that ends with the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*). During this time, God did not want His people to go about business as usual. He directed them to spend time *examining* their lives, being purged of sin, and preparing for a deeper relationship with Him.

This was so *important* that no one was to work. No one was exempt. And each person was to bring God a special offering.

This remains an important day on God’s calendar. It reminds us that He is serious about our lives. He *cares* about us so much that He offers each person the opportunity for a fresh start. We begin this process by searching our hearts and minds, confessing our mistakes, removing anything displeasing to Him, and seeking to be clean in His sight.

This is a day to ask questions: What habits have we formed? Have we become polluted by compromise? Is there anything separating us from God?

This is an opportunity for a fresh start. Don’t take this day for granted. Enter new depths in your relationship with God. Realize He really cares about you and wants to fellowship with you. Remember, He loves you!

In what area(s) of your life do you need a fresh start?

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*In the seventh month on the first of the month you shall have a rest, a reminder by blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall not do any laborious work, but you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD.*

Leviticus 23:24-25 NASB

### PRAYER:

Father, cleanse my heart and mind. Free me from the burdens of sin. Thank You for Your forgiveness. I worship You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

*The love of money is a root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have been led astray and have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves through with many acute [mental] pangs.*

1 Timothy 6:10 AMPC

**PRAYER:**

Father, I commit my time, talents, and treasures to You. I trust You to provide for my needs and take away my worries. In Jesus' name, amen.

How do you balance your financial needs with your spiritual priorities?

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## The Root of All Evil

BIBLE READING: 1 TIMOTHY 6

Money worries *cripple* people every day. Millions are obsessed with money issues. They fret about their income and wonder how to pay their bills. They agonize about their savings.

Proving this point, a recent survey concluded that 73% of Americans said that money causes *more stress* than *anything else*. In fact, "Stress related to money worries can have a real impact on people's psychological health."

We all *need* money. But as Paul warned, the *drive* for money can become an *obsession*. It can dominate our lives, developing into a "*craving*" that can lead us away from God. And these worries often intensify.

The Bible tells us God wants us to be *freed* from worries, fears, and the problems that can result from them. But we cannot be free as long as money is the *focus* of our lives, and we trust in our resources. Paul told Timothy to "*flee from all these things*." Instead, we are to "*pursue righteousness...godliness...faith, love, steadfastness...and gentleness*" (v. 11).

Today, remember that *everything* you have is a gift from God. He promises to supply *all* your needs (Philippians 4:19). If you seek first His Kingdom, He promises that "*all these things*" will be added to you (Matthew 6:33). Seek to be a good steward of the resources you have been given. Trust God. Let Him remove your stress and worry.

## A Pure Conscience

BIBLE READING: TITUS 1

Paul knew that having a pure conscience was important to the life and health of each believer. It was central to serving God and fellowshiping with Him, experiencing the fullness of His blessings, and praying without any hindrances.

The Greek word here indicates that we have a strong moral compass and can distinguish between what is good and what is evil. We can make the right choices in line with the Bible and the revealed will of God.

Having a pure conscience means that we have surrendered our lives to Jesus. We are living in harmony with God and His Word. He has searched our lives and cleansed our hearts and minds. Nothing is blocking the flow of His Spirit in our lives. His Spirit has free reign to identify mistakes we have made and to correct us.

Paul was confident that his conscience was clear. He knew a pure conscience was essential for an effective prayer life. He could pray with confidence because nothing was blocking the flow of the Spirit. He knew he was living in harmony with God.

Today, ask God to help you have a clean and pure *conscience*. Ask Him to help you evaluate your thoughts and actions and free you from anything that violates His Word and pollutes your heart and mind. Be ready to serve Him, free from the entanglements of sin.

Do all of your habits and hobbies point to Jesus?

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*To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled.*

Titus 1:15

**PRAYER:**

Father, search my heart and mind. Examine my habits and hobbies. Help me to be clear and pure in Your sight. In Jesus' name, amen.

*He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.*

2 Timothy 1:9 NIV

**PRAYER:**

Father, thank You for the plan You have for my life. Help me finish the work You have given to me. In Jesus' name, amen.

What special assignment has God given you for His glory?

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# Your Special Calling

BIBLE READING: 2 TIMOTHY 1

Shortly after sunrise on November 1, 1512, Pope Julius II and 17 cardinals entered the Sistine Chapel in Rome. While there to observe vespers, without realizing it, they were part of the public unveiling of a masterpiece.

There, an artist we know as Michelangelo had been laboring on the chapel ceiling for more than four years. Gazing upward, Pope Julius and his colleagues instantly recognized that they were seeing something special. Viewing the finished ceiling was an overwhelming experience.

Many people were surprised when Michelangelo was selected for this prestigious assignment. Known primarily as a sculptor, he rarely touched a paintbrush. Yet the Pope felt Michelangelo was the right man.

There were many moments when Michelangelo doubted his ability for the task. A few years into the project, he wrote his father, "My work does not seem to go ahead in a way to merit anything." He complained of much difficulty. Why? Because painting was "not my profession." As a result, "I lose my time fruitlessly." Yet he persisted, and the result was a work that has stood the test of time.

Remember, God has special assignments for *you*. Have faith in God. When you have doubts, ask Him for the wisdom, strength, and resources you need. Trust Him, confident that He will direct your path.

# Foundation of Faith

BIBLE READING: 2 TIMOTHY 1

Erdmann Neumeister changed the course of Christian music. Born in 1671 in northern Germany, he lectured at the University of Leipzig before becoming a pastor.

His greatest impact was through the words he wrote. It was said he introduced "a new kind of sacred poetry for musical setting." His words were inspirational, emphasizing the practical meaning of the Scriptures. Johann Sebastian Bach and other leading composers wrote music using his texts.

Neumeister declared his testimony through a hymn he wrote, "I Know My Faith Is Founded." Here, he declared his faith was "founded on Jesus Christ, my God and Lord." This was a rock-solid commitment. He said he was "unmoved," standing on His Word.

Even in his time, critics were assaulting the Gospel, but Neumeister affirmed human reason cannot match the truth of God's Word. He knew "God's Word is all sufficient" and that his faith would rest secure.

He knew Satan sought to "rob me of this treasure and take my hope of bliss away." But because God was beside him, he could be freed of fear. He prayed, "In faith, Lord, let me serve You." Even if he encountered strong opposition, he committed to staying faithful.

Make sure *your* faith is founded in Jesus Christ, not on the changing standards of this world. Stand firmly on God's Word.

Is your faith founded on God's Word or the shifting sands of this world?

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*I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that He is able to protect what I have entrusted to Him until that day.*

2 Timothy 1:12 NASB

**PRAYER:**

Father, help me to stand on the authority of Your Word. Thank You for being with me. I trust my life to You. In Jesus' name, amen.



*Hold on to the example of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.*

2 Timothy 1:13 NASB

### PRAYER:

Father, I declare that Your promises are true for me. I commit my life to You! Help me be careful whom I imitate. In Jesus' name, amen.

Whom are you imitating?

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## Your Words

BIBLE READING: 2 TIMOTHY 1

Paul knew words were important—*specific* words. Demonstrating this understanding, he warned Timothy about retaining “*sound words*.” The Greek word here is the source of the English word hygiene. Paul was showing that what we say can impact our relationships and attitudes and foster health or even illness.

Paul also said Timothy was to “*hold on to*” the standard of sound words. He used the Greek word *echō*. Paul knew we tend to be like echoes, mimicking what other people say and do. This is why we need to follow the example of mature believers, know the Bible, and apply biblical principles.

We can imagine Timothy might have thought he didn't need this reminder. But Paul knew we never can assume that we know enough. As he told Timothy, we must recognize that we have been given a “*treasure*,” something life-changing and revolutionary. We must “*protect*” this treasure” (v. 14). But we cannot do this on our own; we need the Holy Spirit.

These are important principles, regardless of how long we have been believers. All of us can be impacted, particularly as we remember that the world around us is filled with evil influences.

Today, be careful whom *you* imitate. Line up your life with the principles in the Bible. Dedicate yourself to retaining “*the example of sound words*.” Speak the right words used by God.

## Distractions

BIBLE READING: 2 TIMOTHY 2

Many *desire* to become a Navy Seal but few succeed. (*Seal* comes from their commitment to *Sea, Air, and Land*.)

Those passing the initial application must undergo a *rigorous* training program that takes at least 30 months. Most fall out; only about a quarter of those who enter the program become Seals. The result is an elite force, among the most respected military organizations in the world.

What makes a successful Seal? One recruit described the *moment* he began to realize what was required. It came during a personal interview with the commander, who silently stared at the recruit for ten minutes. Realizing he was being tested, the recruit *began* to grasp the extraordinary *discipline* he would need.

When the commander finally spoke, he asked, “What do you stand for?” He wasn't interested in clichés or what others thought but his “rock-bottom beliefs.”

The message? Aspiring Seals need to know what they believe, their gifts, and the part they play. They learn that even the best Seals can get distracted, and they need to learn to focus with intensity.

The Bible reminds us how easily believers can be *distracted* and how much we need to *focus* and *know* what we believe. Ask God to give *you* clarity about *your* calling. Ask for a heart of *service*, not entangled with distractions, but focused on the Gospel.

How can you hone your focus more clearly on God alone?

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*No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him... likewise... an athlete, he is not crowned as victor unless he competes according to the rules.*

2 Timothy 2:4–5 NASB

### PRAYER:

Father, I commit my life to serving You. Use me to impact the world with the gifts and talents You have given me. In Jesus' name, amen.

*Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.*

2 Timothy 2:7 ESV

## Get Understanding

BIBLE READING: 2 TIMOTHY 2

Paul told Timothy that if he wanted “*understanding in everything*,” he needed to do something. It wasn’t enough just to listen to the words he heard or know what Paul said. Timothy needed to go a step further. He needed to “*think over*” these words.

Paul used a Greek word meaning to *exercise* the mind. He was recommending a course of action that required thought. He was giving Timothy a *challenge*. If he wanted to understand, he had to put in *extra* effort. This involved absorbing the words he heard and read, mulling them over in his mind, pondering what they meant, studying, and praying.

The result of this activity would be “*understanding*.” The Greek word used suggested putting pieces together like a puzzle. Only when all the pieces were in place would he understand. This understanding was not just in some things but “*in everything*.”

The same promises are true for us. The process begins when we read and know God’s Word. But if we want a deeper understanding, we need to dig, study, and seek God. As we apply this extra effort, we may discover that the pieces fit together in new ways as God blesses us with new insights.

Today, realize that there are truths buried in the Bible. Don’t be content with a quick reading or a surface understanding. *Think over* each word. Ask God for discernment. Ponder. Study. Pray. Dig.

### PRAYER:

Father, I pray that You would give me discernment. Speak to me. Open for me deeper layers of truth. In Jesus’ name, amen.

How do you dig deeper into God’s Word instead of just skimming it?

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## Self-Centered

BIBLE READING: 2 TIMOTHY 3

Paul warned Timothy about trends that would become dominant during “*the last days*.” Leading this list was a prophecy that “*men will be lovers of themselves*.”

We might wonder what is so bad about loving ourselves. The problem is that this easily turns into being *self-centered*. Instead of worshipping God, we focus on ourselves. Instead of obeying His Word, we follow popular ideas that ultimately don’t work. Instead of seeking His wisdom and understanding, we choose ideas that seem right to our flawed minds.

Instead of obeying God, we can find ourselves doing whatever we want. We forget that He is our Creator and knows everything about us. We can forget that He has seen the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10) and can help us avoid mistakes and do the things that will lead to blessing and success.

Remember the dangers of being self-centered or thinking that you understand the best course of action. Realize that God truly desires the best for you. He has given you His Word to help you, and His Word is true. He can provide clear direction and lead you away from pitfalls and traps.

Don’t make the mistake of thinking you are smarter than God. Pray and seek His direction. Submit your life to Him. Seek to be humble in His sight. Constantly live according to His principles, ever on guard against the dangers of being self-centered.

Compose a prayer of self-surrender to God.

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*Know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy.*

2 Timothy 3:1–2

### PRAYER:

Father, I surrender my life to You and humble myself before You. Keep me from being self-centered. I trust You to guide me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

*Aaron shall make atonement on its horns once a year; he shall make atonement on it with the blood of the sin offering of atonement once a year throughout your generations. It is most holy to the LORD.*

Exodus 30:10 NASB

**PRAYER:**

Father, search my heart. Reveal any sin in my life. I confess my sins, accepting Your forgiveness. I long to fellowship with You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Write a prayer of confession and ask God to show you any sin.

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# Clean and Free

BIBLE READING: EXODUS 30

Imagine the scene. Thousands of Israelites were gathered in the wilderness, celebrating their deliverance from Egypt. As they began this new era, God provided rules by which He wanted them to live.

Among the most important rules was His command that every year *everyone* was to stop *everything* for a day of *prayer*, taking time to *examine* their hearts and lives. The goal was not to punish them but provide an opportunity for deeper fellowship.

To encourage reflection, no one was allowed to work or even eat. This entire day was "*most holy to the LORD*." This was *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement).

As part of the observance, the high priest made atonement for himself and other priests through a sacrifice. Then, he sacrificed a goat as an offering for sin. A *scapegoat* was sent into the wilderness, symbolically demonstrating how God was taking away their sins.

This year, the commemoration of *Yom Kippur* begins today at sundown. This still is a day "*most holy to the LORD*." It is a day for personal cleansing and a day to remember all Jesus did for us. He did what animal sacrifices could not. Like the scapegoat, He took our sins away "*as far as the east is from the west*" (Psalm 103:12).

Make this a day for sober reflection. Be cleansed from sin, and get right with God. Draw closer to Him, realizing His desire to fellowship with you.

# Turning Away

BIBLE READING: 2 TIMOTHY 4

Paul prophesied that the time would come when people would not "*tolerate sound doctrine*." Instead, they would have "*an itch to hear what they want to hear*." As a result, they would refuse to recognize God's messengers or believe His Word. Instead, they would turn toward "*myths*," believing *whatever* they wanted and whatever made sense to them.

Instead of living according to God's standards, they would develop their own rules and follow teachers who spread their own ideas. Instead of accepting the Bible as God's Word, they would follow ideas that reinforced their desires and opinions. They would reject anything they did not want to do, for whatever reason.

The world is filled with people who approach life this way. The pressure to conform and be like these people can be enormous. Christians can be accused of being hopelessly out of date or having foolish beliefs.

This is a time to renew our commitment to serve God, submitting our lives to Him. He calls us to be aware of the dangers of compromise and why we should stay faithful to His Word. We are not to conform to what seems popular but follow the leading of His Spirit. We are to study the Bible and live according to His standards.

Today, search your heart and mind. Be on guard against compromise. Submit your life anew to God. Commit to living according to His Word.

In what areas do you feel pressure to conform to the world's standards?

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*People will not tolerate sound doctrine, but... will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear what they want to hear. They will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside to myths.*

2 Timothy 4:3-4 CSB

**PRAYER:**

Father, help me resist the pressure to conform. I will base my life on Your Word. I believe Your Word is true. In Jesus' name, amen.



*But as for you, use self-restraint in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

2 Timothy 4:5 NASB

## Not Intimidated

BIBLE READING: 2 TIMOTHY 4

Born in Sweden, Wilhelm Stenhammar became a skilled pianist and conductor but aspired to be a composer. Finally, after years of honing his craft, he felt ready to debut a major composition—his first symphony.

Then, just a month before introducing that symphony, Stenhammar suddenly became discouraged. Why? He heard a symphony written by Finnish composer Jean Sibelius. Comparing his own piece, Stenhammar felt *intimidated* and *inadequate*.

He allowed his first symphony to be performed once, but *plagued with doubts*, never permitted additional performances. Years later, his first symphony would be discovered and admired by later generations. Many wondered what could have happened if he had not been so *discouraged* but fully developed his gifts.

Many believers face a similar dilemma. God may have given them unique talents, yet comparing themselves with others, they feel *intimidated* or uncertain.

God wants us to persevere and never surrender to doubts. As Paul told the timid Timothy, “*God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.*” Paul called on him to “*kindle afresh*” the gift God had provided (2 Timothy 1:6–7).

The same is true for you! Don’t allow yourself to be paralyzed by doubt or comparisons. Faithfully use the gifts God has given you.

What gifts and talents has God given you to use for His glory?

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## Loving this World

BIBLE READING: 2 TIMOTHY 4

Demas had been described as a “*fellow worker*” of Paul, comparable to Mark (Philemon 1:24). He was one of Paul’s faithful colleagues, on par with Luke (Colossians 4:14). He had been a loyal friend, trusted by Paul and part of his inner circle.

But by the time Paul wrote to Timothy, Demas had “*deserted*” him. The Greek word Paul used indicates that he had transferred his loyalties elsewhere. What had happened?

Demas “*loved this present world.*” We don’t know all the details, just that his affections had *shifted*. Rather than seeking first the Kingdom of God, he had become focused on “*this present world*” with its pleasures and attractions.

Just think of all Demas had experienced—the miles he traveled with Paul, the *miracles* he had seen, the *teachings* he had heard. Yet the world’s attraction was so strong that he could walk away from everything he knew. If the world could attract such a man, the same thing can happen to *any of us*...even you.

Today, think about your own life—your affections, your loyalties, your ambitions. Do the things of this world have such a hold on you that you might compromise?

Search your heart, and renew your relationship with God. Remember, “*The world is passing away and also its lusts, but the one who does the will of God continues to live forever*” (1 John 2:17).

Have you ever lost a friend for one reason or another?

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*Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.*

2 Timothy 4:10 NASB

### PRAYER:

Father, I seek first Your Kingdom. Keep me from letting the world capture my affections. Help me stay true to You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

*People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy.*

Proverbs 28:13 NLT

## The Door to Freedom

BIBLE READING: PROVERBS 28

God does not want us to be shackled by sins or prisoners to our mistakes. He wants us to be free—free of worries, free of the burdens that weigh on our hearts and minds.

But to be free, we must be honest with God, *admitting* our mistakes rather than ignoring or trying to hide them. We must *acknowledge* and *confess* sin, realizing that confession opens the door to forgiveness and blessings.

When we approach God in prayer, we need to remember that He sees what we do. He knows our hearts and minds. He knows the words we speak, every thought, and everything we have done. We may be able to hide from others, but we cannot hide from Him.

We can choose to ignore or cover up our sins, hoping God does not know about them. We can pretend they never happened. Or we can *confess* them to Him.

Confession is essential if we want to be clean. Proverbs warns that if we try to cover up our sins, we cannot prosper. Sin separates us from God, pollutes our lives, and blocks the flow of His Spirit. However, we receive forgiveness and mercy when we confess our sins and forsake them. We enter the path to freedom.

Ask God to reveal any sins in your life. Do not try to cover them up, but be *honest* with Him. Confess. Then rejoice in His forgiveness and freedom!

### PRAYER:

Father, search my heart. Reveal any sin in my life. Help me to be honest with You and not cover up my sins. In Jesus' name, amen.

Are you always honest with God in your heart?

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## Serving the Lord

BIBLE READING: 2 TIMOTHY 4

The voices over the phone could not hide the emotions. Interviewers from an independent marketing firm were stunned by the honest comments made by pastors in a series of interviews.

The goal had been to learn about their experiences, and if they felt adequately prepared for ministry. But all conveyed a sense of *isolation*. As pastors, they felt they were expected to be perfect, yet all were human and imperfect. They all admitted difficulty finding trustworthy friends. Many were concerned about being too honest.

As these pastors realized, the task of serving the Lord can be lonely. We find these same kinds of emotions in Paul's letter to Timothy. He felt deserted by Demas. Alexander the coppersmith had hurt him. Only Luke was with him. How he *longed* for Timothy to arrive and bring Mark.

The concerns of these pastors provide a sobering reminder that within the body of Christ, we all need each other. We all need people we can trust, with whom we can pray and share without fear.

Today, remember to *pray* for pastors, missionaries, and others in ministry. Stand in the gap for them. Support them. And always remember to be a person others can trust.

Write a prayer for your pastor and others in leadership at your church.

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*Make every effort to come to me soon, for Demas has deserted me... Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Bring Mark with you, for he is useful to me in the ministry.*

2 Timothy 4:9–11 HCSB

### PRAYER:

Father, I commit these people to You: \_\_\_\_\_. Bless them. Empower them. Lift their burdens. Meet their needs. In Jesus' name, amen.

*He will destroy death forever. The LORD GOD will wipe away the tears from every face and remove his people's disgrace from the whole earth, for the LORD has spoken.*

Isaiah 25:8 HCSB

### PRAYER:

Father, I commit these situations to You: \_\_\_\_\_ . I seek Your perspective. Help me understand. I trust You. In Jesus' name, amen.

What circumstances are you trying to make sense of?

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## We'll Understand

BIBLE READING: ISAIAH 25

Maxwell Cornelius was brought up on a farm but became a brick mason and contractor in his youth. Then, working on a building project, he suffered a severely broken leg. The diagnosis revealed that the only hope was to amputate the leg. He survived the procedure but was crippled for life.

Increasingly turning to God, he became a minister in his home state of Pennsylvania but moved to California because of his wife's health. There he turned a struggling church into one that was thriving.

But shortly after the family's move, his wife died. Struggling to understand the tragedies in his life, Cornelius preached the sermon at her funeral. He quoted from a hymn he had recently composed called, "Sometime We'll Understand." Reflecting on the problems he experienced, he described how we may not understand the events of our lives, but "some time" we will.

Through every challenge, we need to trust God, confident that He will hold our hand. The way may be dark, but we can still praise Him, confident that sometime we'll understand.

Are you going through any experiences you may not understand? Remember to commit them to God, confident that someday it will all make sense. Somehow everything will work together for good (Romans 8:28).



## COME TO JESUS

Do you ever wonder how it was possible that so many of the Pharisees did not recognize that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ?

They scrutinized His life and words and watched His miracles as they happened. They had the Old Testament in their hands and were master interpreters of its minutest details. Yet they did not know the Son of God when He stood right in front of their eyes.

It is scary, isn't it? You can be the most religious person in the world, analyze the Hebrew or Greek words with exacting precision, commit the entire Bible to memory, and still have no revelation from God—zero. It was true then, and it is just as true today. Too many have His book in their hands and even in their heads but never hear His voice.

The prophet Hosea said, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6). The religious leaders of Jesus' time failed to see that having piles of head

knowledge did not mean they had heart knowledge.

As a Master Physician, Jesus analyzed the root of their problem: His word was not abiding in them. For them, there was no link between the written words and the heart reading of those words.

Jesus Christ stood before them as a living person, full of divine power to save—in Himself alone, not the daily sacrifices, or books, or priests. You cannot get to eternal life by going around Him or by only going near Him. You must actually come to Christ spiritually and by faith believe in Him and receive His life and grace. Coming to Jesus means believing that only He can save.

To hear God's voice is possible when we come to Him. Come your own way—run, walk, or crawl—but always come to Jesus. ❖



by Ben Cerullo



# Hope for the Future

Hope is not just wishful thinking. Hope is a confident expectation in God and His Word. Hope is a beacon of light, a source of comfort, and endless inspiration.

We're told over and over again in the Bible to have hope and to place our hope in God, yet where do we get this elusive hope? We can't just manufacture it ourselves. Divine hope is a gift of the Holy Spirit. He is the One who enables us to have hope, as we see in Romans 15:13:

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (NIV).*

Hope is the very foundation of our faith, as the writer of

Hebrews declares: *"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen"* (11:1 ESV). Later on in this same chapter, we read that we cannot please God without faith (v. 6).

Although *hope* and *faith* may seem like interchangeable terms—and they are related—they are different. Hope is confidence in some future fulfillment, while faith is shaped by our belief systems and based in the present.

We can hope in God because His character is trustworthy, and His lovingkindness is faithful. He has proved Himself over and over again throughout Scripture—and throughout our lives. So we look back at God's faithfulness and look forward with hope as Lamentations instructs us:

*But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him" (3:21–24 ESV).*

The greatest example the Israelites had for God's faithful deliverance was the exodus from slavery in Egypt. That's why God instituted Passover—so they would always remember. And He instituted the Feast of Tabernacles, which we celebrate at the end of this month, so the Israelites would always remember how God sustained them through 40 years of wandering in the wilderness after the exodus. Recalling these events should have increased their hope in God's future promises.

We, too, can look back at our lives and see God's faithful hand at work. Some things may be more obvious than others—a car wreck that you could have been in if you'd left your house a few minutes earlier, a surprising bonus at work that just covers an unexpected bill, the right song on the radio at just the right time. These things help us to look forward to the challenges and unknowns ahead with hope that God will continue to display His covenant lovingkindness to us.

How's your hope? Does it need a boost? Each week, meditate on these verses about hope, and let us know how they change your heart! ❖

## Week One

*"We have this [Jesus] as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain."*

Hebrews 6:19 ESV

## Week Two

*"For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken."*

Psalms 62:5–6 ESV

## Week Three

*"Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."*

Romans 5:3–5 ESV

## Week Four

*"In hope [Abraham] believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations."*

Romans 4:18 ESV

# faithful

'fāth·ful

**Definition:** Full of faith; true to one's word, promises, vows; reliable, trusted, or believed.



Even in a time of great distress, the prophet Jeremiah declared of the Lord, "Great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:23). And not only is God always faithful to His promises, but Proverbs 28:20 (NRSV) describes *faithfulness* as a key trait of those who want to unleash more of God's blessings in their lives:

*The faithful will abound with blessings!*

"I am thanking God for being a partner in this ministry, which is reaching many souls in the world. God is really moving through this ministry, and I thank Him for the wonderful and divine work God is using them to do!"—HENRY, Austria

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# A Merry Heart...

does good, like medicine. – Proverbs 17:22

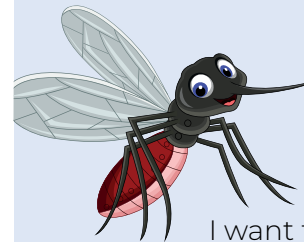
The oldest computer was owned by Adam. It was an Apple with very limited memory. Just 1 byte and everything crashed!

## THE 4 STAGES OF SIN



Got some clean, Christian humor you'd like to share?

Email it to:  
[MerryHeart@inspiration.org](mailto:MerryHeart@inspiration.org)



I want to be so **FULL OF CHRIST** that if a mosquito bites me, it flies away singing there is **POWER IN THE BLOOD**



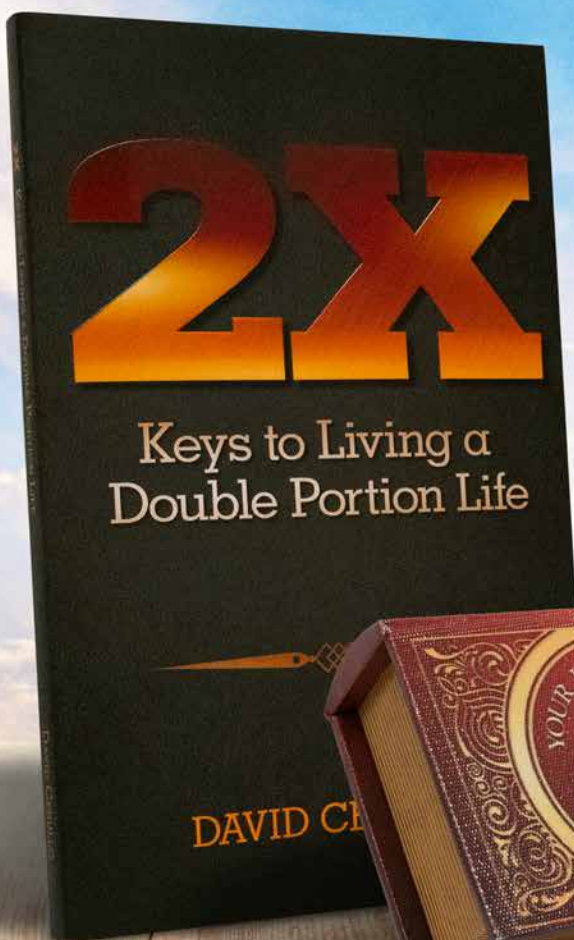


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