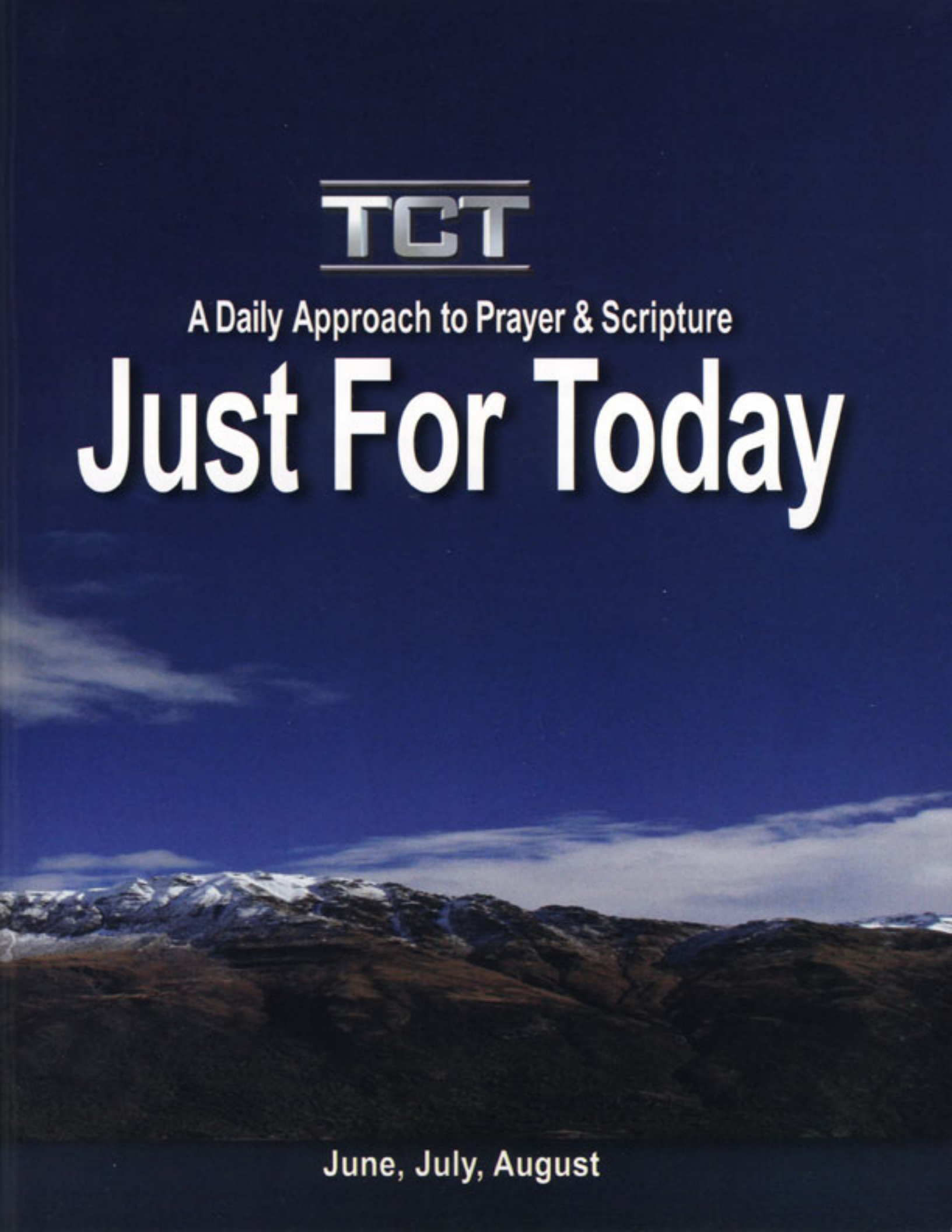


The logo for TCT (The Christian Today) is displayed in a bold, metallic, sans-serif font. The letters are white with a grey gradient and are flanked by two horizontal lines above and below them, giving it a three-dimensional, industrial appearance.

TCT

A Daily Approach to Prayer & Scripture

Just For Today

The background of the cover is a photograph of a mountain range. The foreground shows dark, forested hills. In the middle ground, there are rolling hills and valleys. In the background, a range of mountains is visible, with the highest peaks covered in snow. The sky is a deep blue with some light, wispy clouds near the horizon.

June, July, August



Dear Partner,

As a TCT Partner we consider you a part of our extended family. And we thank you for your financial gifts, prayers, and testimonies that encourage us as we work together to reach the world with the Good News of Jesus.

We pray you will find strength and encouragement for your everyday walk with the Lord through the daily readings of this devotional.

We both want to thank you for standing with us and being a partner with TCT.

May God richly bless your life.

GARTH & TINA

Tuesday June 1

“But the word of the Lord stands forever.” 1Pe 1:25 NIV

Read Your Bible!

Jana Jones says, “During the day I take a few moments to unwind by reading the Bible. After seeing me do this for several years, my four-year-old daughter became concerned: ‘Aren’t you ever going to get finished reading that book?’” You could read the Bible for a lifetime and not “scratch the surface.” There’s no other book like it. Observe:

(1) No human being would have written a standard so high. Stop and think of the best person you know. You must admit, even they would have left certain things out, wouldn’t they? (2) There’s an aura the Bible generates which no other book does. Martin Luther said, “The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold of me.” Try laying a newspaper on your table at a restaurant and no one will give you a second look. But lay your Bible on it and they’ll stare at you, watch you chew your food, and maybe even read your license plate when you get into your car. That’s because the Bible creates a sense of God’s presence that forces a reaction in the hearts of men and women. (3) We are changed as we read it. Our core values are altered, peace enters our spirit, joy wells up within our heart. “The Word of God is full of living power. It is sharper than the sharpest knife, cutting deep into our innermost thoughts and desires. It exposes us to what we really are” (Heb 4:12 NLT). The answers you need are in your Bible, so make it part of your everyday life.

Wednesday June 2

“Give me this [mountain] that the Lord promised me.” Jos 14:12 NIV

Keep Climbing

Admiral Joe Fowler served in both world wars. As a naval architect he designed two of America’s largest aircraft carriers, the USS Lexington and the USS Saratoga. He retired from the Navy in 1948. Shortly after, Walt Disney asked him to head up the design and construction of his first theme park in California. Nothing like it had ever been done before. Not only did Fowler complete the project in 1955, he managed its operation for many years. Later when Disney wanted to build another theme park in Florida, he called Fowler to do it. When Fowler completed the project in 1971, he was seventy-one. End of story? No, when Fowler was eighty-seven Disney called on him again to build a futuristic theme park called Epcot Center. When asked why he would take on such a project at eighty-seven Fowler replied, “You don’t have to die until you want to.” In 1993 he completed the job, and laid down his drawing board at the age of ninety-nine. Mission accomplished!

At eighty-five years of age Caleb said to Joshua, “Give me this [mountain] that the Lord promised me [forty-five years ago]” (See Jos 14:12). Did he get it? Yes. So keep climbing. Will you make mistakes along the way? Sure! Henry Ford forgot to put a reverse gear in his first car. He also went bankrupt five times before becoming the father of the automobile industry. You’ll stumble on your way to the top, but if you seek God’s help and stay with it, you’ll get there. The truth is, you’re not defeated until your doubts and regrets take the place of your dreams.

Thursday June 3

“Look at the birds in the sky!” Mt 6:26 CEV

What’s Good for the Goose (1)

Speaking to an anxiety-ridden crowd, Jesus said: “I tell you not to worry about your life...Look at the birds in the sky!” You say, “What can I learn from looking at a bunch of birds?” Have you ever been to Pennsylvania in early winter? If so, you’ve seen the skies literally darken as multitudes of Canadian geese gather for their annual flight to the sunny south. For the next few days let’s look at their behavior, and learn:

They fly united. Geese don’t fly separately, in random style, because no goose alone can go that distance. They’re designed to fly in their characteristic “V” formation. When a bird flaps its wings the air movement created provides an uplift, easing the work load of the bird behind it. Together, their flight range increases about 71 percent. Even the youngest, weakest and oldest geese can make the trip. They accomplish together what they could never accomplish separately. There’s a lesson here: when the Bible says, “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another” (Heb 10:25 NIV), it means, “Stay in fellowship with one another, and enjoy the uplift it provides.” You’re not called to fly solo. “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’” (1Co 12:21 NIV). Occasionally a goose strays off on its own but soon becomes exhausted, loses altitude and ultimately pulls wearily back into the formation. “Look at the birds,” and learn.

Friday June 4

“Look at the birds in the sky!” Mt 6:26 CEV

What’s Good for the Goose (2)

Every goose is a “pinch-hitter.” When one goose gets in a pinch, another “goes to bat” for him. Every formation has to have a “point goose,” out front, leading, setting the pace for the others. It’s a tough position because the point goose cuts the headwinds, meets the changing weather conditions, is first to feel the rain in his face, the snow in his eyes and the ice on his wings. He keeps the formation on target whatever the situation. It’s hard, exhausting and lonely at times because there’s nobody ahead of him to be the wind beneath his wings. The formation depends on him to persevere, stay on track and get them safely to their destination.

Every church has its point goose: the pastor. Each department has its point geese: youth, finance, evangelism, care ministries, etc. They lead, set the pace and give direction to those who follow. There are two common roles in the church: the under-employed and the over-functioning. Point ministries are the latter, so they tend to burn out frequently. Just before the point goose is exhausted, a space opens in the formation and he slips back into it while another bird replaces him, seamlessly becoming the next point goose. Pinch-hitting for each other preserves the life of the formation. This is what Paul meant: “The whole body [is] held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part” (Eph 4:16 NAS). Don’t be content to be a consumer, be a producer! A great church isn’t about paid staff; it’s about volunteers willing to pinch-hit whenever needed.

Saturday June 5

“Look at the birds in the sky!” Mt 6:26 CEV

What’s Good for the Goose (3)

In the world of geese, the aged, very young, and infirm are kept protected in the rear of the formation. But they aren’t isolated, discounted or considered useless; they fulfill a vital role. They become the honking section and cheer for the leaders. Inevitably bad weather threatens the mission. The going gets tough and the tough are struggling. From the rear of the formation a lone honk sounds, initiating a goose chorus honking encouragement to the point goose. Paul understood this: “Encourage one another and build each other up” (1Th 5:11 NIV). He knew we need a “honking section” supporting us with uplifting words and prayer. We need those who say, “We are behind you. We’ve got your back!” “But...you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good” (2Th 3:13 NKJV). Many a servant of Christ has crossed their deepest valley on a wing, a prayer, and a honk from some old pock-marked, battle-hardened, straggle-feathered, half-bald honker of encouragement who was too stubborn to let a brother or sister quit on their watch! Occasionally a strident, out-of-tune goose complains loudly and irritatingly. Within moments the honking section kicks in, drowning out the grumbler, restoring order and unity. The church’s problem isn’t too many people speaking negatively, it’s too few speaking positively! When someone cries, “defeat,” honk back, “victory.” When they cry, “fear,” honk back, “faith.” A few words of encouragement can overpower a storm of complaints. So join the honking section and be known like Barnabas, whose name means “Son of Encouragement” (Ac 4:36 NIV).

Sunday June 6

“Look at the birds in the sky!” Mt 6:26 CEV

What’s Good for the Goose (4)

With geese, their relationship is “till death do us part.” They take it seriously. They’re fully committed. When the ravages of time or circumstances make it impossible for a bird to continue the trip and it begins to lose altitude or fails to keep abreast of the formation, the gaggle provides it comfort, nurture and protection. Two strong geese leave the formation, flying with the “patient” safely between them, find a sheltered location with food and water and make a home for the needy bird. They’ll stay with their ward till it either recovers or dies before joining another formation. For them, everything goes “on hold” to care for another bird! What an example of Christ-like relationship and self-sacrificing love. “God has combined the members of the body...that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it” (1Co 12:24-26 NIV). In today’s culture we discount and marginalize the needy, including those no longer functioning as they once did. But God demands we “have equal concern for each other,” especially with those suffering. If a gaggle of birds can do it, surely God’s family ought to do it too. “Look at the birds in the sky!” Jesus directs. If they can do it for each other, “Aren’t you worth more than birds?” (Mt 6:26 CEV). One of the two greatest commandments (not suggestions) Christ gave us is, “Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater” (Mk 12:31 NIV). When word circulates that we love each other this way, they’ll beat down the doors of our church to get in!

Monday June 7

“Look at the birds in the sky!” Mt 6:26 CEV

What’s Good for the Goose (5)

Lost and stray geese are always welcomed into the formation. It’s not an exclusive club for the elite. Birds separated from other formations, isolated by weather, accident or infirmity are given full family status. The formation will alter its plans, reschedule its arrival time and inconvenience itself to accommodate any strangers seeking its acceptance. Many newcomers arrive dirty, bedraggled and ill-fed. They’re never turned away. God’s church isn’t a museum for masterpieces, it’s a hospital for those who have been hurt by life. (Even self-inflicted hurt.) Jesus said: “All...who are weary and carry heavy burdens” are accepted (See Mt 11:28 NLT). “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also...there shall be one flock and one shepherd” (Jn 10:16 NIV). Christ has no higher agenda than to recruit, save and adopt the stranger into His flock. You say, “But they’re not my kind of people; they don’t look, talk or smell like me!” So what? We don’t get to choose our biological or spiritual siblings; God does. If they rub us like sandpaper they’re helping rub off rough edges and polish us up. Want to see the material God builds the church with? Prepare for a shock. “The unrighteous...fornicators...idolaters...adulterers...homosexuals...thieves...covetous...drunkard s...revilers...extortioners...And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1Co 6:9-11 NKJV). We were taken into the formation, washed, sanctified, justified and given full family status!

Tuesday June 8

“God is...a very present help in trouble.” Ps 46:1

“Very Present”

Randy Reid, a thirty-four-year-old construction worker, was welding on top of a nearly completed water tower outside Chicago. According to writer Melissa Ramsdell, Reid unhooked his safety gear to reach for some pipes when a metal cage slipped and bumped the scaffolding on which he stood. It tipped, and Reid lost his balance. He fell 110 feet landing face down on a pile of dirt, just missing rocks and construction debris. A fellow worker called 911. When paramedics arrived they found Reid conscious, moving, and complaining of a sore back. Apparently the fall didn’t cost Reid his sense of humor. As paramedics carried him on a backboard to the ambulance, Reid had one request: “Don’t drop me.” (Doctors later said Reid came away from the accident with just a bruised leg.)

Sometimes we resemble Randy Reid. God protects us from harm in a 110-foot fall, yet we are not willing to trust Him to get us over the next two-foot hurdle. Being sinful, we fail. Being prone to sickness, we hurt. Being mortal, we die. Pressure wears on us. Anxiety gives us ulcers. People intimidate us. Criticism offends us. Disease scares us. Death haunts us. What’s the answer? “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Note the words “very present.” When we hit life’s rough spots our tendency is to feel abandoned, yet the opposite is true. At that very moment we are more than ever the object of His love and concern. Yes, even when our vision is blurred, our thinking foggy, our faith fleeting, and we look up and can’t see Him clearly—He is “very present.”

Wednesday June 9

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” Jer 29:13 NIV

Fénelon’s Formula for Prayer

Is your prayer life consistent? Is it rich and rewarding? Do you see measurable growth in it? If not, François Fénelon, a 17th-century Frenchman, tells us how to pray and get results. It’s a tried and true formula worth following:

“Tell God all that is in your heart, as one unloads one’s heart, its pleasures and its pains, to a dear friend. Tell Him your troubles that He may comfort you; tell Him your longings that He may purify them; tell Him your dislikes that He may help you conquer them; tell Him your temptations that He may shield you from them; show Him the wounds of your soul that He may heal them; lay bare your indifference to good, your depraved taste for evil, your instability. Tell Him how self-love makes you unjust to others, how vanity tempts you to be insincere, how pride hides you from yourself and from others. If you thus pour out all your weaknesses, needs, and troubles, there will be no lack of what to say. You will never exhaust the subject, for it is continually being renewed. People who have no secrets from each other never want for subjects of conversation. They do not weigh their words for there is nothing to be held back. Neither do they seek for something to say. They talk out of the abundance of their heart. Without consideration, they simply say just what they think. When they ask, they ask in faith, confident that they will be heard. Blessed are those who attain such familiar, unreserved communication with God.”

Thursday June 10

“The Lord was with Joseph.” Ge 39:2 NKJV

You Can Rise Above Your Beginnings!

Joseph didn’t come from an ideal family. He was the eleventh son of Jacob, a con man and a conniver. By this time, however, Jacob had gotten his spiritual act together. But his ten older sons took after their dad. They once deceived and killed an entire town of men because one of them raped their sister (See Ge 34). Now they’re about to commit another deed of treachery, selling Joseph into slavery. Yet Joseph turned out to be a man of greatness. Bottom line: You can rise above your beginnings! Look at Joseph. Perhaps you’ve been rejected, or discovered the people you thought loved you really didn’t. That’s Joseph’s story. But, “The Lord was with Joseph.” Those words change everything! Regardless of what happened yesterday, if you remain faithful to God He can rearrange tomorrow in your favor. Many people who’ve been mistreated are still focusing on the people who hurt them, waiting for them to make things right. In a lot of cases that isn’t going to happen. If you’ve been wronged you need to turn to the One who won’t hurt you, and who is there to help and heal you. Face it, some relationships aren’t going to get fixed! Your parents may never accept you. You may not be able to escape the problem you’ve been living with or resolve it to your liking. God’s not limited by your past, He’s only limited by your lack of faith. So trust Him. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Ro 8:31 NIV). If God is for you, in the final analysis it doesn’t matter who’s against you.

Friday June 11

“Seek out...men of good reputation...whom we may appoint over this business.” Ac 6:3
NKJV

Four Qualities of a Good Leader

Good leaders practice: (1) Submission. Only a leader who has followed well, knows how to lead others well. “Connecting” with people becomes possible because you’ve walked in their shoes. Leaders who’ve never submitted to authority tend to be proud, unrealistic and autocratic. (2) Self-discipline. To make consistently good decisions requires character and self-discipline. To do otherwise, is to lose control of ourselves. British essayist John Foster writes, “A man without decision of character can never be said to belong to himself. He belongs to whatever can make a captive of him.” Peter writes, “Knowing God leads to self-control” (See 2Pe 1:5-6 NLT). (3) Patience. Leaders look ahead, think ahead, and want to move ahead. That’s what makes them leaders. But the true goal of leadership is not to cross the finish line first, but to take as many others with you as you can. For that reason you have to deliberately slow your pace, stay connected to your people, keep them informed and inspired, enlist the help of others to fulfill your vision, and keep going. And you can’t do that if you’re running too far ahead of everybody. Solomon writes: “Finishing is better than starting. Patience is better than pride” (Ecc 7:8 NLT). (4) Accountability. Many people feel that accountability is a willingness to explain your actions. No, real accountability begins long before you take action. Most wrong actions come about because we are not being accountable early enough. To lead well, you must have these qualities.

Saturday June 12

“We are not ignorant of [Satan’s] devices.” 2Co 2:11 NKJV

Don’t Take the Bait

Satan, whom the Bible refers to as “the tempter,” works in two ways like a seasoned fisherman: (1) He knows fish get hungry and he knows when they’ll be biting. Understand this: you were born with a hole in your soul that only God can fill. And unless you turn to God and build a relationship with Him, you’ll keep trying to fill that hole with the wrong things. “Where can I find the right things?” you ask. The Psalmist answers, “In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Ps 16:11 NKJV). There’s a marked difference in how Joseph responded to temptation with Potiphar’s wife and how David responded to it with Bathsheba. David looked, and kept looking, but Joseph fled. As a result David reaped terrible heartache and Joseph reaped great blessing. The Bible says, “If sinners entice you, do not consent” (Pr 1:10 NKJV). Be honest with yourself. Acknowledge that there are places you shouldn’t go, habits you shouldn’t indulge, and company you should never be in. (2) He knows what bait will hook them. Next time somebody fails and you’re tempted to think, “I’d never do that,” stop and ask yourself, “What would it take to make me bite?” You may not know the answer to that question at the moment, but Satan does. And he is patient; he’ll wait a lifetime if he has to; he’s in no hurry. He doesn’t mind whether you fall through “youthful lusts,” or on the last few laps through more subtle sins, so long as you lose the race. So, “don’t take the bait.”

Sunday June 13

“We...are...one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” Ro 12:5 NIV

Working Together

If you're wise you'll pray: “Lord, who do I need in my life at this time?” and, “Who do you want me to help?” The first question requires humility, the second requires unselfishness. There's no limit to what can be accomplished when nobody cares who gets the credit. A great illustration of this is Tenzing Norgay, a Sherpa born in Nepal. He tells how he and Edmund Hillary, a New Zealander, accomplished what no other human beings ever had: conquering Mount Everest. Tenzing says, “For each level we reached, a higher degree of teamwork was required. One group would exhaust themselves just getting the equipment up the mountain for the next group. Two-men teams would work finding a path, cutting steps, securing ropes, spending themselves to make the next leg of the climb possible for others. You don't climb a mountain like Everest by trying to race ahead on your own or by competing with your comrades. No, you do it slowly and carefully, by unselfish teamwork. Certainly I wanted to reach the top myself; it was the thing I'd dreamed of all my life. But if the lot fell to someone else I would take it like a man, not a crybaby. Where would Hillary and I have been without the others? Without the climbers who made the route? The Sherpas who carried the loads? Those who cleared the path ahead? It was only through the work and sacrifice of them all that we had our chance at the top.” The Bible teaches, “We...are...one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” So let's keep that in mind today and try to work together!

Monday June 14

“When he saw him, he had compassion.” Lk 10:33 NKJV

“Do I Have Compassion for Others?”

The priest and the Levite in the story of the Good Samaritan saw the plight of the dying man, but the Good Samaritan exercised compassion and did something about it. So, ask yourself, “Have I become too calloused to care or too busy to be bothered?” There's so much need around us, and God knows, we can't meet all of it. But what needs are you called to meet? Next time you see the Salvation Army ringing their bell and taking donations, remember how it all started. There was a couple who lived in London 155 years ago. For the first ten years William Booth was in a quandary: what was God calling him to do? One day his wife Catherine, a Bible teacher, was invited to speak in London. While they were there William took a late-night walk through the slums of London's East End. Every fifth building was a pub. Most had steps at the counter so little children could climb up and order gin. That night he told Catherine, “I seem to hear a voice sounding in my ears, ‘Where can you go to find such heathen as these, and where is there so great a need for your labors?’ Darling, I have found my destiny!” Later that year, 1865, the couple opened the “Christian Mission” in London's slums. Their life's vision: to reach the “down-and-outers” that other Christians ignored. That simple vision of two people grew into the Salvation Army, which ministers through three million members in ninety-one countries. Now, stop and ask yourself, “Do I have compassion for others?”

Tuesday June 15

“Let us follow the Spirit’s leading.” Gal 5:25 NLT

Get Serious About Living a Godly Life

Charles Spurgeon said, “If we are not seeking the Lord, the Devil is seeking us.” And he gets us, when we lower our guard and become complacent. If you’re serious about living a godly life, read on:

“Live according to your new life in the Holy Spirit. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves. The old sinful nature loves to do evil, which is just the opposite from what the Holy Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are opposite from what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, and your choices are never free from this conflict...when you follow the desires of your sinful nature, your lives will produce these evil results: sexual immorality, impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure, idolatry, participation in demonic activities, hostility, quarrelling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, divisions, the feeling that everyone is wrong except those in your own little group. Envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other kinds of sin...But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, He will produce this kind of fruit in us; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control...those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to His cross and crucified them there. If we are living now by the Holy Spirit, let us follow the Holy Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives” (See Gal 5:16-25 NLT). When you get serious about living a godly life, God will help you.

Wednesday June 16

“Bring me seventy...who are known...as leaders.” Nu 11:16 NIV

Work from Your Core Strengths

A group of neighborhood kids built a tree house and formed their own club. When the grownups were told who had been selected for which office, they were astonished to hear that a four-year-old boy had been elected president. “He must be a born leader,” one dad observed. “How did it happen that all you bigger boys voted for him?” His son replied, “Well, he can’t very well be secretary because he doesn’t know how to read or write. He couldn’t be treasurer because he can’t count. He would never do for sergeant-at-arms because he’s too little to throw anybody out. If we didn’t choose him for anything, he’d feel bad. So we made him president.” Life doesn’t work that way! You don’t become successful by default, you must work from your God-given strengths. In life, your purpose is always connected to your giftedness. God doesn’t call you to do something you’ve no talent for. God told Moses, “Bring me seventy...who are known to you as leaders.” You cannot grow to your full potential if you continually work outside your core strengths. Improvement is always related to ability. Do you know what happens when you spend all your time working on your weaknesses, and never develop your strengths? If you work really hard you could claw your way up to mediocrity, but you’ll never get beyond it. Economic necessity and family responsibility may require you to work for a season outside the area of your core strengths, but don’t settle there. Seek God’s guidance, sharpen your gifts, be patient, and God will open doors for you.

Thursday June 17

“Love your neighbor.” Mk 12:31 NKJV

Learn to Value Others

Here are two things we should never do: (1) Expect to feel fully at home in this world, because “we are citizens of heaven” (Php 3:20 NLT). (2) Become so heavenly minded that we are no earthly use. The “salt” and “light” principles Jesus taught call for us to influence and illuminate others for good and for God. That means taking responsibility to do things better at home, on the job, and in all our dealings. If the only people you show genuine care for are in your church, your salt isn’t flavoring and your light isn’t dispelling darkness. Christ’s command to “Love your neighbor” includes the less-than-lovable. And you only love others when you add value to their lives! You ask, “How do I do that?” (1) By truly valuing them. That calls for believing in them before they believe in you, serving them before they serve you, loving them before they love you, and giving to them without expecting anything in return. (2) By making yourself more valuable. But you can’t give what you don’t have. So you must earn and grow, in order to give and guide. (3) By knowing what they value. What happens when you’re interested only in your own agenda? You know very little about the people around you. Make others’ priorities, your priorities. Ask to hear their stories. Discover their hopes and dreams. Make their success part of your mission. (4) By doing things that God values. When your life is done, what will you have lived for? Eventually everything on earth will turn to dust—including you! So give yourself to things that will last beyond your lifetime.

Friday June 18

“I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.” Ac 26:19

When God Gives You a Vision (1)

Paul had a “heavenly vision.” But there are those who “speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the Lord” (Jer 23:16 NKJV). So you must be sure you are operating according to God’s plan, not your own, or somebody else’s. The story of the Tower of Babel teaches us two things: (1) When people make up their mind to do something, they often succeed. (2) Succeeding doesn’t mean that you’re in the will of God. The word Babel (confusion) means others can think you’re right, yet you’re wrong. You ask, “But isn’t it okay to make plans and set goals?” Yes, but your plans and goals should come out of a vision that God has given you.

When Paul said, “I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision,” he meant that there’s only one acceptable response to God’s plan—obedience! Partial obedience, selective obedience, or delayed obedience are still disobedience. William Carey, who is considered the father of modern missions, gave up comfort and fortune to go to India and introduce the gospel. One of his more memorable quotes is: “Attempt great things for God, expect great things from God!” But you can only say that with confidence when you know what God has called you to do. What He ordains, He sustains! When you set your own goals you lack a heart-deep confidence that God is doing the work, so you wear yourself out thinking it’s all up to you. However, when you know God has given you a vision for your life, you trust Him, even when you can’t see any way to bring it to pass.

Saturday June 19

“I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.” Ac 26:19

When God Gives You a Vision (2)

When God gives you a vision: (1) It will interrupt you. Sometimes God will speak in a voice you can't tune out. Other times, like Jonah, God will let you go to the bottom to get your attention. Either way, things won't go right until you say yes to Him. (2) It will illuminate you. You may not like what God says. Ananias didn't like going to pray for Saul of Tarsus, a man with the power to put Christians to death. But God said, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel...I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake” (Ac 9:15-16 NKJV). Notice the word “suffer.” The Devil isn't going to send you a congratulatory telegram because you have decided to do God's will, so be prepared for attack. (3) It will inspire you. You will accomplish things you never dreamed possible. Look at Gideon. When God found him he was hiding in a winepress (See Jdg 6:11 NKJV); not exactly a promising start. When the angel called him “a mighty man of valor” (v. 12 NKJV), he replied, “I am the least in my father's house” (v. 15 NKJV). When the angel said, “The Lord is with you,” he replied, “If the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us?” (vv. 12-13 NKJV). When he finally took the job, he wondered, “How can so few of us defeat so many of them?” Yet at that very moment his enemies were having nightmares about him (See Jdg 7:13-15). The secret of victory lies in knowing: “It is God working in me” (See Php 2:13).

FATHER'S DAY – Sunday June 20

“These words which I command you...teach them diligently to your children.” Dt 6:6-7 NKJV

Keep Bending the Twig

On Father's Day a pastor was making the point that it's not enough to “talk the talk,” you must also “walk the walk.” He said, “It doesn't matter what you tell your kids, they'll turn out just like you. That scares me. Does it scare anyone else?” Looking over the congregation he saw that the only hand raised was his son's! “As the twig is bent, so grows the tree.” As a father it's your responsibility to “Point your kids in the right direction” (Pr 22:6 TM). Just as you nourish them with good food, the attitudes you transmit become food for their minds. Don't feed them cynicism and half-baked theology; feed them spiritually by talking to them about the things of God “wherever you are, sitting at home or walking in the street” (Dt 6:6 TM). Dr. D. James Kennedy observed: “Sending children to public schools and [expecting] school to teach them everything is a relatively recent development. From the 1600's until the mid 19th century parents maintained responsibility for their children's education. And...the curriculum included Bible reading and prayers. Today...society has allowed the eradication of both. We can no longer rely on the school system to support Christian views, we must work even harder to ensure our children grow in Christ. How do we bend the twig? With a God-centered education that teaches sound moral principles...kids need high academic standards...and direction towards attaining them through discipline...guidelines, boundaries and rewards...Those of you who have children...don't give up. Keep bending the twig...[and] one day you'll have a tree that stands tall and bears fruit for God's glory.”

Monday June 21

“Take the stumbling block out of the way.” Isa 57:14 NKJV

Stumbling Blocks

To fulfill your God-given purpose in life you must confront your defects of character, see them as stumbling blocks and begin to remove them. Here are six of the most common ones: (1) Pride. Spiritual pride, social pride—God hates all forms of pride. His Word says, “With humility...regard one another as more important than yourselves” (Php 2:3 NAS). Pride toppled Satan from the number two position in heaven, and it will topple you too if you let it. (2) Insecurity. Insecure people aren’t willing to take risks. They complain about their lot in life, yet they’re afraid to embrace change and do something about it. They prefer to remain comfortable. What’s the solution? Stepping out in faith, being confident in God! (3) Moodiness. Moody people are like the wind, you don’t know which way they’ll blow. You can’t depend on them. Confidence is never built on a person who’s fickle. (4) Perfectionism. Perfectionism is the obsessive need to perform flawlessly. It stifles your creativity, and turns others off. Perfectionists can’t affirm themselves, therefore it’s difficult for them to affirm anybody else. (5) Over-sensitivity. Over-sensitive people are always licking their wounds and looking inward; as a result they’re unaware of the needs of others. Ironically, they never understand why they’re so lonely. (6) Negativity. Negative people are hard to be around. Their personality says no to life in general, and folks tend to avoid them like the plague. Do you recognize any of these stumbling blocks in your life? If so pray, ask God for help, and go to work removing them.

Tuesday June 22

“God has given gifts to each of you.” 1Pe 4:10 NLT

Use Your Talents to Glorify God

Your work is important to God. Your job uses up forty hours in your week, so it should represent Him. “God has given gifts to each of you...Manage them well...then God will be given the glory.” We’ve each been given talents for the purpose of honoring God in this world. Undiscovered, undeveloped gifts dishonor Him; so do misused ones. God has gifted you to do something in a way nobody else can. By tapping into your unique abilities and using them to promote His kingdom, you’re fulfilling His will in the truest sense. Paul says, “Everything comes from him...and is intended for his glory” (Ro 11:36 NLT). The breath we breathe, the blood that courses through our veins, the gray matter between our ears are God’s investment in us. And He expects a return. Max Lucado writes: “We exist to exhibit God, to display his glory. We serve as canvases for his brush strokes, papers for his pen, soil for his seeds, and glimpses of his image...He un-commons the common by turning kitchen sinks into shrines, cafes into convents, and nine-to-five workdays into spiritual adventures...When you magnify your Maker with your strengths...your days grow suddenly sweet.” So, be like the great New England preacher Jonathan Edwards, who lived by two resolutions: “Resolved first: that all men should live for the glory of God. Resolved second: that whether others do or not, I will.”

Wednesday June 23

“Who may enter your presence...Those who...do what is right.”

Ps 15:1-2 NLT

Image or Reality?

Charles Swindoll writes: “Behind the scenes...life can be...a façade held together with cheap material. Solomon was a man upon whom God showered wisdom, success and wealth...[But] he let his relationship with the Lord slip...Some say success can ruin a man. I say [it] reveals who he was all along. Success doesn’t destroy character, it exposes it. During Solomon’s reign Israel’s wealth continued to build. David had won peace with an aggressive military campaign, and surrounding kingdoms held Israel in high regard...The threat to Solomon’s kingdom came from within. Like his father David, Solomon had many wives. They enticed him into idolatry, and when Rehoboam became king Israel was divided. The public man appeared genuine...but behind the scenes he emulated his father and grandfather (2Ch 11:18-23). He nurtured a public image while passing on a dark legacy to his sons...polishing his image by appearing to seek wise counsel, then rejecting it in favor of advice from his peers...When the kingdom’s wealth was pilfered by Egypt, Rehoboam replaced the gold shields with bronze ones polished to shine like gold, but worthless in comparison...a third-class substitute after a first-class blunder...‘Like produces like’—a lust for sensuality produced children with lust in their hearts. Within a generation or two a seed of compromise grew to rebellion in full bloom. David’s compromise weakened Solomon, and Solomon’s impacted Rehoboam. Finally, the sin mom loved and dad permitted, entangled the son. Have you fooled yourself into thinking you can manage the consequences of sin? Or considered the effect on the people you influence? If cameras were pulled behind the scenes of your life, what would we see?”

Thursday June 24

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Php 4:13 NKJV

You Have What’s Required!

When David first arrived at King Saul’s palace he was a simple, unknown shepherd boy. But he had an impressive résumé! And God, in essence, said, “I saw you kill the bear and the lion; I was watching when you didn’t realize it.” Solomon wrote, “A man’s gift maketh room for him” (Pr 18:16). David’s gift may have been only a slingshot, but it opened the door to his future as Israel’s king. So even though what you’ve got doesn’t seem like much—give it to God and watch what He can do with it. You say, “But I’m not formally trained.” All God requires is that you show up, say yes, and make yourself available. When you give God what you’ve got, He gives you what He’s got; that makes your odds unbeatable. “But I don’t have the right credentials,” you say. So what? Benjamin Franklin had less than two years of formal schooling. Yet at twenty-five he founded America’s first library, at thirty-one he started its first fire department, at thirty-six he designed a heating stove that’s still in use today, at forty he harnessed the power of electricity, at forty-five he founded the nation’s first university, and at seventy-nine he invented bifocals. He was an economist, philosopher, diplomat, inventor, educator, publisher, and linguist who spoke and wrote in five languages. Chances are, you already have more education than he had when he was your age. Add to that these two promises, “The Lord is my helper” (Heb 13:6 NKJV), “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” and you have what’s required!

Friday June 25

“The Child grew and became strong.” Lk 2:40 NKJV

Start Where You Are!

When do we get our first clue that Jesus knows He is the Son of God? In the temple when He was twelve years old. His parents are three days into the return trip to Nazareth before they notice he’s missing. The temple is the last place they search, but it’s the first place Jesus goes. By the time Joseph and Mary locate their son He has confounded the most learned scholars in the temple. As a boy Jesus already senses the call of God. But what does He do next? Recruit disciples and preach sermons? No, He goes back home and learns the family business. That’s what you should do! Before you attempt to do great things for God, go home, love your family and take care of business. “But I’m called to be a missionary,” you say. Good, your first mission field is where you live! What makes you think you’ll be believed by those who barely know you, if you’re not credible to those who know you best? Charity begins at home! The Psalmist says, “I will lead a life of integrity in my own home” (Ps 101:2 NLT). For His first thirty years Jesus’ neighbors remembered Him as a worker. “He’s just a carpenter” (Mk 6:3 TM). Jesus spent years developing a work ethic, sharpening His vocational skills and supporting His family. “He had to enter into every detail of human life” (Heb 2:17 TM). Why did Jesus do it that way? So He would know how we feel. So we’d be confident in going to Him with our needs, knowing He’s qualified and able to meet them. So, start where you are!

Saturday June 26

“Those you allow to remain will become...thorns in your sides.”

Nu 33:55 NIV

Knowing Who Belongs in Your Life

Earthquakes result from two tectonic plates on a fault line shifting against one another, then lurching in opposite directions. And that’s what happens when you bond with the wrong people. It’s why God instructed the Israelites concerning the hostile nations in the Promised Land: “Those you allow to remain will become...thorns in your sides.” When a relationship is not working, when your efforts to rehabilitate it have failed, acknowledge it. Sometimes you just have to swallow your pride and admit that instead of lifting them up, they’re dragging you down. Releasing somebody doesn’t mean they’ll never improve, it just means God is better suited to the job. Be careful around those who are always trying to make you feel guilty for not “being there.” Only God can always be there! There’s a difference between helping somebody and carrying them. Your help may actually be a hindrance. Why should they even try, if you’re always there to do it for them? Your need to be needed could be getting in the way of their need to grow. Step back and let them walk on their own. Not everybody will be happy when you do that, but they’re not supposed to be. Jesus said, “Woe to you when all men speak well of you” (Lk 6:26 NKJV). Don’t let fear of criticism overwhelm your common sense. People don’t take confrontations well, but this is a matter of survival. Every relationship is for a reason, and a season. Discern those who belonged in your past, from those who belong in your life now.

Sunday June 27

“Don’t just do the minimum that will get you by.” Col 3:23 TM

Always Give Your Best

One of Michelangelo’s greatest masterpieces was his sculpture of David. He worked on it with such passion that he often slept in his clothes, resenting the time it took to take them off and put them on again. He repeatedly examined and measured the marble to see what pose it could accommodate. He made hundreds of sketches of possible attitudes, and detailed drawings from models. He tested his ideas in wax on a small scale, and only when he was satisfied did he pick up his chisel and mallet. He approached the painting of the Sistine Chapel with the same intensity. Lying at uncomfortable angles on hard boards, breathing the suffocating air just under the vault, he suffered from inflamed eyes and skin irritation from the plaster dust. For the next four years he literally sweated in physical distress—but look at what he produced! Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “If a man is called to be a street sweeper he should sweep streets as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause and say, ‘Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.’” If you’re not passionate about what you do, find something you can be passionate about! Don’t just strive to make money, strive to make a difference. Significance should be your goal, not survival. Paul gives us the ultimate reason for always giving our best: “Don’t just do the minimum that will get you by. Do your best...Keep in mind always that the ultimate Master you’re serving is Christ” (vv. 23-24 TM).

Monday June 28

“The Lord’s unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him.” Ps 32:10 NIV

Work on Your Attitude!

The most important choice you make each day is your choice of an attitude. So choose:

(1) An attitude of thanksgiving. “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God...for you” (1Th 5:18 NKJV). Paul was in prison when he wrote those words, so his attitude wasn’t based on his surroundings; it was a choice he made. (2) An attitude of trust. “The Lord’s unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him.” Where does such trust come from? Feeding daily on God’s Word! Nehemiah’s wall builders were surrounded by enemies, yet they were able to “celebrate...because they understood the words which had been made known to them” (Ne 8:12 NAS). God’s Word gives you confidence! Satan doesn’t fear your sin, he knows God can forgive it. He doesn’t fear your depression, he knows God can drive it away. He doesn’t fear your lack, he knows God can provide. He fears your discovery of God’s Word, because your ignorance of it is the most effective weapon he can use against you. (3) An attitude of love. “These things I have spoken to you...that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another” (Jn 15:11-12 NKJV). Love says, “I accept you as you are, care when you hurt, desire only what’s best for you, and erase all offences.” It refuses to look for ways to run, and opts for working things through. It’s resilient. While the world around gives the opposite counsel, love stands firm.

Tuesday June 29

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.” Ac 1:8 NLT
You Have the Power, Use It!

When Ray and Dorothy Buker went to Burma in 1926, there were other missionaries there. These missionaries had established their own banking system and afternoon tea routine, complete with trained butlers—none of which fit Buker’s concept of preaching the gospel. A former Olympian, accustomed to hardship, he wanted to go where others wouldn’t, and that brought him north into China. When his wife suffered a nervous breakdown and help wasn’t available, Buker prayed, read to her, and nursed her back to health. During WWII he fled for his life from the Japanese army, and when he died at ninety-two he left a legacy of souls won to Christ. Where did Buker get his grit and tenacity? Jesus said, “When the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power to preach with great effect.” During the early days of computers, when the power went out, if you hadn’t saved your work you lost it. Now an uninterruptible power supply (UPS) stops that from happening. God never intended us to operate on the world’s system, His Spirit gives us: (1) Power to choose. By keeping us “established...[strong in...purpose]...having control over [our]...will and desire” (1Co 7:37 AMP). (2) Power to endure. Handling trials with grace proves “our...power is from God...not from ourselves” (2Co 4:7 NLT). (3) Power to overcome. “We are weak...but...we...live...by the power of God” (2Co 13:4 RSV). (4) Power to minister. “According to the...working of his power” (Eph 3:7 RSV). (5) Power to witness. “For the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power” (1Co 4:20 RSV). You have the power, use it!

Wednesday June 30

“God loves a person who gives cheerfully.” 2Co 9:7 NLT
Make Giving a Lifestyle

A kid who had just learned to tie his shoes was crying, so his mom asked, “Is it that hard?” “No,” he sobbed, “but now I’ll have to do it for the rest of my life!” Is that how you feel about giving? You want to learn, but you’re not sure that you want to make it a lifestyle?

Some swallows were teaching their young to fly from a branch overhanging a lake. One by one the mother bird pushed each of her chicks to the end, until somewhere between the branch and the water they discovered they could fly. Their mother understood what they didn’t—until you learn to fly you’re not really living! Understand this: giving is an action built into us by God; it’s the air into which we were born. But until you realize that, you’ll cling to everything you have! The Bible says, “Whoever sows generously will also reap generously” (2Co 9:6 NIV). Everything in life begins with a seed. Your seed is anything that can multiply: your love, your time or your money. Your harvest is what comes back to you in benefits like joy, good relationships, and yes, finances. If what you have is not enough to be a harvest, sow it as a seed, believing God will multiply it back to you in the areas you need it most. Go ahead, you’ll love the results! Giving is like flying. When you learn to let go of what you’re clinging to and launch out, you realize, “This is how I was born to live!”

Thursday July 1

“When he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion [on him].” Lk 15:20 NKJV

What’s Your Attitude Toward Your Child?

Chuck Colson writes, “When I was at Buckingham Palace...Prince Philip asked me, ‘What can we do about crime here in England?’ I replied, ‘Send more children to Sunday school.’ He thought I was joking. But I pointed out a study by sociologist Christy Davies, which found that in the first half of the 1800s British society was marked by high levels of crime and violence, which dropped dramatically in the late 1800s and early 1900s. What changed an entire nation’s national character? Throughout that period attendance at Sunday schools rose steadily until by 1888, a full 75 percent of children in England were enrolled. Since then attendance has fallen off...with a corresponding increase in crime and disorder. If we fill the Sunday schools we can change hearts and restore society.”

Does that mean our children will never lose their way? No, it just means they’ll realize the truth of what they were taught, recall the joys of being in “Father’s house,” and return because they know they’ll be welcomed back. You’ll notice, no charge of parental neglect is laid at the doorstep of the prodigal’s father. He was a great role model. He supported his children financially and emotionally. He guided them without forcing them to conform. He gave them room to fail—and a place to return. What does reflect on us as parents, however, is our attitude toward them. Your child may be “a great way off,” but they need to know you care, that you love and pray for them, and that you’ll welcome them home.

Friday July 2

“My Father never stops working, and so I keep working, too.” Jn 5:17 NCV

Your Work Matters to God (1)

A salesman stopped to visit a client and was amazed to find a big dog emptying wastebaskets. “All part of the job!” the dog said cheerfully. “Does your boss know how fortunate he is to have a talking dog?” the salesman asked. “No,” replied the dog, “and don’t tell him—or he’ll have me answering phones next!” The Bible says, “There is nothing better than to...find satisfaction in work...these pleasures are from...God” (Ecc 2:24 NLT). Max Lucado says: “Before God gave Adam a wife or child...He gave him a job in ‘the garden...to cultivate...and keep it’ (Ge 2:15 NAS). God deems work worthy of its own engraved commandment: ‘You shall work six days, but on the seventh...you shall rest’ (Ex 34:21 NAS). But emphasis on the day of rest can make us miss the command to work...your work matters to God...and society...Cities need plumbers. Nations need soldiers. Stoplights break. Bones break...Someone has to raise kids, raise cane, and manage the kids who raise Cain! Whether you log-on or lace-up...you imitate God...Jesus said, ‘My Father never stops working...so I keep working too’ (Jn 5:17 NCV). Your career consumes half your life. Shouldn’t it broadcast God? Don’t those 40-60 hours belong to Him too? The Bible never promotes work-a-holism as pain medication, but God calls the physically-able to till the gardens He gives...So use your uniqueness (what you do), to make a big deal out of God (why you do it), every day of your life (where you do it).”

Saturday July 3

“God cares about honesty in the workplace.” Pr 16:11 TM

Your Work Matters to God (2)

The Human Resources Director was taken aback when he heard what the job applicant asked to be paid. “You certainly expect to be compensated well for a beginner.” The applicant replied, “Well sure, work is a lot harder when you don’t know what you’re doing.” A cute story, but: “God cares about honesty in the workplace; your business is His business.” You should give an honest day’s work for an honest day’s wages. Eric Harvey says: “Think about somebody you know who’s of good character, and reflect on the characteristics that make them a role model... Chances are that high on the list is commitment—an unwavering dedication to being a good family member and friend—to doing their best on and off the job... to doing what’s right, noble and decent. Committed people... have their heads and hearts in the right place. They keep their priorities straight... stay focused on what’s important... What they believe drives how they behave, and how they behave determines their character... their reputation... and the legacy they leave.” Abraham Lincoln observed: “Commitment is what transforms a promise into reality. It’s the words that speak boldly of your intentions, and the actions which speak louder than the words. It’s making time when there is none... it’s coming through time after time, year after year. Commitment is the stuff character’s made of... the power to change the face of things... the daily triumph of integrity over skepticism.” An admirer approached the world-renowned pianist Van Cliburn after one of his concerts and said, “I’d give my life to be able to play like you.” Smiling, Cliburn replied, “I did!”

Sunday July 4

“Work... as... for the Lord.” Col 3:23 NLT

Your Work Matters to God (3)

Dr. Adrian Rogers said: “God takes ordinary people and gives them power to do extraordinary things. Whether you put hub caps on tires... key data... dig ditches or wash dishes, ‘work as... for the Lord.’ Jesus’ home was the cottage of a working man. Mending plows or mending souls, Jesus was doing God’s work because people need houses and furniture. Knowing you’re serving the Lord puts dignity in running a machine, greasing cars, carrying mail, painting houses, or cutting grass. Tell God, ‘I’m doing this for you and I’ll do it with all my might’... That kind of attitude puts a spring in your step... You’re a priest of God... in full-time service, and if that doesn’t ring your bell—your clapper’s broken!” As Leigh Priebe Kearney says: “No job’s perfect... there’ll always be things you aren’t thrilled about. See the big picture: find out where the company’s heading and how you fit in. Reach out: ask what’s important to your co-workers and how you can help them.” You can have almost anything you want, if you help enough other people get what they want. Remember the three C’s: (1) Commitment. Workers who get ahead share a sense of commitment: they’re fully engaged in their work. (2) Control. They’re proactive, not passive. (3) Challenge. They see stressors as opportunities for growth. Don’t wait for your ship to come in—swim out to meet it! Management won’t suddenly recognize your potential, pluck you from obscurity and rocket you to the top. Draft a plan, then talk to your boss. A game plan shows you’re open to professional growth. Keep learning: talk to people from other departments, take classes, and tackle projects outside your comfort zone.

Monday July 5

“Forgiving one another...even as Christ forgave you.” Col 3:13 NKJV

Is There Someone You Need to Forgive?

The greatest power you have over anyone who hurts you, is the power of forgiveness. When you say, “I forgive, and no longer hold it against you,” both sides are set free from the negative bond that exists between you. But there’s more: we also free ourselves from the burden of being the “offended one.” As long as we don’t forgive those who’ve wounded us we take them with us, or worse, carry them like an albatross around our neck. One of our great temptations is to cling in anger to our enemies, then define ourselves as being wounded by them. Forgiveness, therefore, not only liberates the other party, it liberates us too! It’s the way to true freedom. Now, forgiving doesn’t always mean forgetting. Though we forgive somebody, the memory of what they did might stay with us a long time. We can carry it in our emotions as a scar, or even in our bodies as a physical sign. But forgiveness changes how we remember. It turns the curse into a blessing. When we forgive our parents for their divorce, our children for their lack of love, our friends for their unfaithfulness in times of need, our counselors for their bad advice, or our boss for treating us unfairly, we no longer have to experience ourselves as the victims of events over which we have no control. Forgiveness allows us to take back our power and not let the events embitter, limit, or destroy us. Is there someone you need to forgive?

Tuesday July 6

“My soul, wait silently for God.” Ps 62:5 NKJV

The Ability to Wait Well

Daniel Coleman calls the ability to wait well, “the master attitude.” Having it requires: (1) Humility. “As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters...so our eyes look to the Lord” (Ps 123:2 NKJV). The story’s told about a guy who waited so long to see his doctor that he ended up sending the doctor a bill for his time! Seriously, in life there’s a correlation between status and waiting. Lower status people generally wait for higher status ones, and the wise learn to wait with grace. Waiting reminds us that we’re not in charge; it humbles us in ways we need to be humbled. (2) Trust. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding” (Pr 3:5 NKJV). Among trapeze artists, a special relationship exists between the flyer and the catcher. Once the flyer lets go, he must trust the catcher to grab him. Likewise, we must do what God tells us, then wait for Him, even when we don’t clearly see His hand at work. Those are the seasons that deepen and develop our faith. (3) Expectation. “My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him.” Eugene Peterson writes: “In prayer, we are aware that God is in action, and that when the circumstances are ready, when others are in the right place, and when our hearts are prepared, He will call us into action. Waiting in prayer is a disciplined refusal to act before God acts.” So the word for you today is, “Learn to wait well, it’s the master attitude!”

Wednesday July 7

“Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at His footstool.”

Ps 99:5 NKJV

Wonder and Worship

Never lose your sense of wonder, or you'll lose your motivation for worship. Unless you believe God is all-powerful, ever-present and approachable, you'll live in a state of anxiety believing that everything depends on you. You'll shrink from sharing your faith in case you're ridiculed or can't find the right words. You'll fail to be generous because the source of your security is in yourself. You'll avoid confronting those who need it, because without the certainty of God's acceptance you become a slave to people's opinions.

We live in a cynical age that discourages wonder. We've diminished the marvel and awe, yet deep down we still ache for it. When you shrink your concept of God to fit your own rationale, you pray without faith, work without passion, serve without joy, and suffer without hope. And the result is fear, retreat, and loss of vision. But there's one thing that's guaranteed to restore your understanding of how big and wonderful God is—worship. God created us so that when we experience something awe-inspiring we need to praise it, to wrap words around it. We don't worship God because He needs it, but because we do. Without worship our perception of Him is incomplete, we forget how great He is, we overlook our calling and become self-involved. We lose our sense of wonder and gratitude by plodding through life with blinders on, and we become self-reliant, stubborn and proud. So, each day let's pause and say with the Psalmist, “Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at His footstool.”

Thursday July 8

“Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth.”

Pr 10:4 NIV

God Rewards Diligence

Ruth was working as a farmhand when Boaz picked her to be his wife. Elisha was plowing his fields when Elijah hired him to be his assistant. Peter, James and John were fishing when Jesus chose them to be disciples. God calls people with a proven work ethic. Not once did Jesus call lazy people, or those sitting around waiting for their big break.

In God's eyes there are no menial jobs, only menial attitudes. Whether you're the janitor or the CEO, “It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1Co 4:2). God will only give you more, when you've proven yourself with what you've got. The Bible says: “He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich” (Pr 10:4 NKJV). “The soul of a lazy man desires, and has nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich” (Pr 13:4 NKJV). “Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings” (Pr 22:29 NKJV). Blessing follows work just as surely as reaping follows sowing. “The Lord will command the blessing on... all to which you set your hand” (Dt 28:8 NKJV). God blesses dreams, but not daydreamers. You've got to get up and go to work! “Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it” (Ge 2:15 NKJV). When God made Adam He put him to work, because productivity is essential to self-esteem! So discern where you belong, work hard, then when something needs to be done God will know where to find you.

Friday July 9

“Now the Lord...said to Abram.” Ge 12:1 NKJV

Abraham (1)

The life of Abraham teaches us that: (1) God can call you at any time of life. Without protesting or postponing, Abraham said, “Yes Lord!” And his unquestioning obedience is a rebuke to those of us who say, “I’m too old, leave it to the younger folks.” Or, “I’ve earned the right to kick back and take it easy; let others do the heavy lifting.” There’s no retirement in the service of the King of Kings! He has the right to ask you for anything, and send you anywhere at any season of life. (2) God’s plan brings fulfillment, but it’s always greater than your own personal fulfillment. Abraham was called to populate the entire Middle East. “I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing” (v. 2 NKJV). These words are a rebuke to those among us who seek to make a name for ourselves rather than allowing God to do it for us. In God’s kingdom you don’t seek status, you earn it by being of service to others. (3) God will treat others according to how they treat you. God told Abraham, “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you” (v. 3 NKJV). When you are in God’s will you don’t have to promote or protect yourself, God will do it for you. “He permitted no man to do them wrong; yes, He rebuked kings for their sakes, saying, ‘Do not touch My anointed ones’” (1Ch 16:21-22 NKJV). Knowing that sets you free to go where God wants you to go and do what He wants you to do.

Saturday July 10

“Now the Lord...said to Abram.” Ge 12:1 NKJV

Abraham (2)

Abraham had the ability to hear God’s voice. “Now the Lord...said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you.’” Abraham couldn’t turn to the Scriptures for guidance, and there were no prophets around to say, “Thus saith the Lord.” Getting it right was critical. He was being called to leave his job, his home and his security. He needed to know that the voice he was hearing was truly God’s voice. This leads us to conclude that Abraham had developed a relationship with the Lord. And building a relationship takes time, effort, sensitivity and commitment. Others may counsel you and confirm what God is telling you, but ultimately you must learn to hear from God for yourself. Nothing increases your confidence like knowing God has given you clear direction for your life.

Author Gary Thomas says he and his wife prayed extensively about buying a house and gave God many opportunities to close the door. Five years later, when the house was worth considerably less than they paid for it, they asked God, “Why didn’t You stop us?” At that point God’s Spirit whispered, “Have you ever considered the possibility that I wanted you in that neighborhood to minister there, rather than to boost your financial equity?” God didn’t tell Abraham, “Stay here, and I’ll make you even richer.” No, He said, “Get out.” Yes, he became rich. But does obedience obligate God to bless us in the way we think He should, or can it call us to sacrifice? Think about the cross before you answer that one!

Sunday July 11

“Now the Lord...said to Abram.” Ge 12:1 NKJV

Abraham (3)

Abraham trusted God to fulfill His promise, come what may. “By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents” (Heb 11:9 NKJV). Some nights Abraham probably thought, “I wish I was back home sleeping in my own bed.” Being in God’s will gives you confidence, but it won’t always make you comfortable. Following a plan you didn’t devise, to a destination you see in your mind but can’t explain, is called “walking by faith.” God decides the plan, moves you from point A to point B, and says, “Trust me; I’ve got it all worked out.”

In 1945, before he met Billy Graham, Cliff Barrows and his fiancée, Billie, had scraped together enough funds for a simple wedding and two train tickets to a city with a resort hotel. On arrival, however, they found the hotel shut down. Stranded in an unfamiliar city with little money, they thumbed a ride. A sympathetic driver took them to a grocery store owned by a woman he knew. The newlyweds spent their first night in a room above the store. The next day, when the lady overheard Cliff playing Christian songs on his trombone, she arranged for them to spend the rest of their honeymoon at a friend’s house. Several days later the host invited them to attend a youth rally where a young evangelist was speaking. The song leader that night was sick, and Cliff was asked to take charge of the music. The young evangelist, of course, was Billy Graham. The two became partners from then on. When things don’t go your way, God has plans of His own. Better plans!

Monday July 12

“Live purposefully.” Eph 5:15 AMP

Do Something!

Are you easily swayed by what others say and do, or do you have a plan and stick with it? Are you doing what you love, or just doing things out of mindless routine? Mark Twain said, “The secret of success is to make your vocation your vacation.” In other words, love what you do and do what you love! Many of us never get around to fulfilling God’s purpose for our lives because we’re so busy keeping everybody happy. This world is filled with people who think they know what you should be doing with your life. No, it’s your life, and when you stand before God He won’t ask anybody else about it except you! Are you courageous enough to follow your heart rather than the crowd? Are you focused, even when many voices try to draw you away from your purpose? An interesting phenomenon occurs when you have no strong convictions or clear purpose of your own; you tend to get irritated with those who do.

The term “whatever” seems to be especially popular these days. While we must always strive to live in harmony and consider other people’s feelings and viewpoint, God’s Word condemns complacency, indifference, and an unwillingness to stand up for what we know is right. We need to be intentional. We can’t just stand around waiting to see what everyone else is going to do, then follow the crowd. There are basically two kinds of people: those who wait for something to happen, and those who make things happen. Don’t say, “I wish they would do something about this problem.” You are they—do something!

Tuesday July 13

“The number of the disciples multiplied greatly.” Ac 6:7 NKJV

Knowing What’s Important for You

The New Testament church experienced phenomenal growth when its leaders recognized what they were not called to do, delegated it to others and got back to doing what only they could do. As a result, “the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem.” Keeping your mind on what’s important for you requires simplification, and simplification means trade-offs. It means saying no to certain things you’d like to do. If you don’t choose what trade-offs you make, someone else will. The “Pareto Principle” teaches that 20 percent of your effort produces 80 percent of your success. So identify your 20 percent, stay there, delegate the rest or let it go. To help you do this, answer these three questions: (1) What takes up most of your time and energy? Determine how your activities can be categorized according to the following list: (a) Something I was taught or told I should do. (b) Something I see other successful people doing. (c) Something I know I should be doing. (2) Are you maximizing your strengths? If you need help determining what your strengths are, seek advice from others who know you well, then ask yourself, “Am I doing them? Am I growing in my ability to do them? Am I enlisting others to do what I can’t or shouldn’t do?” (3) Are you spread out too thin? Are you determined to know everything that goes on in every area of your life? Is your philosophy, “If you want something done right, do it yourself?” No, nobody has that much time and energy! Learn to let some stuff go, get back into focus and start concentrating on what’s important for you.

Wednesday July 14

“Whoever accepts and trusts the Son gets...everything.”

Jn 3:36 TM

The Best of Both Worlds

It’s said that the wealthy English Baron Fitzgerald had only one child, a son. Early in his teens the boy’s mother died. Tragically, in his late teens the boy died also. In the meantime, Fitzgerald’s financial holdings greatly increased due to acquiring the artwork of Europe’s greatest masters. Before his death, Fitzgerald left explicit instructions that an auction be held at which his entire art collection would be sold. A big crowd of prospective buyers gathered. Among them were many well-known museum curators and private collectors eager to bid. The artwork was displayed for viewing before the auction began. Among the paintings was one that received little attention. It was of poor quality and by an unknown local artist. It happened to be a portrait of Fitzgerald’s only son. As the auction began the auctioneer read from Fitzgerald’s will, which clearly instructed that the first painting to be sold was of “my beloved son.” Because of its poor quality the painting didn’t receive any bids—except one. The bidder was the old servant who’d helped raise the boy and had dearly loved him. For less than an English pound he bought the painting. At that point the auctioneer stopped the bidding and asked the attorney to read again from the will. The crowd was hushed as he read, “Whoever purchases this painting of my son, gets all my art collection—the auction is over!”

Christ: without Him you have nothing. But with Him you have the best of both worlds: this one, and the one to come.

Thursday July 15

“Test me in this,” says the Lord.” Mal 3:10 NIV

Be a Tither!

It's estimated that less than one-tenth of all those who attend church, give a tenth of their income to God's work, even though the Bible clearly teaches that the first tenth of all we earn belongs to God. “A tithe of everything...is holy to the Lord” (Lev 27:30 NIV). Today two-thirds of the church's income comes from people aged sixty-nine or older. That's alarming! We need to teach our children the responsibility and rewards of tithing. Perhaps you think tithing only applied to those who lived under the Old Testament law, like the Pharisees. No, Jesus said, “Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees...you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:20 NIV). The tithe is a minimum, your love and faith should determine the maximum. Abraham paid tithes six hundred years before the law (See Ge 14:20), then Jesus endorsed it saying we “ought” to tithe (See Mt 23:23), and the writer to the Hebrews confirmed that it's still God's plan (See Heb 7:4-5). As believers, we are the spiritual seed of Abraham, and as such, his blessings have been promised to us (See Gal 3:14). But if you want what Abraham had, you've got to do what Abraham did—and he was the first man in Scripture to tithe! Giving God the first tenth of your income makes Him number one in your priorities. His Word says, “Bring the whole tithe...Test me in this,'...and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it” (Mal 3:10 NIV). Do you want to walk in God's blessings? Be a tither!

Friday July 16

“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me.” Mt 11:29 NKJV

Pace Yourself (1)

Too many of us are like the guy who said, “When I rest, I rust.” Here's a news flash—there will always be something else to do! If you're constantly driven by “what needs to be done,” you'll burn out and fail to do what God has assigned you to do. So here are some practical suggestions for pacing yourself:

(1) Change your eating habits. The Bible says, “It's not smart to stuff yourself with sweets” (Pr 25:27 TM). You wouldn't put sugar into your gas tank, so be wise; educate yourself about good nutrition. (2) Be clear about where you want to go. Set specific goals, and have a plan and a timetable for reaching them. Don't be controlled by mindless routine. (3) Instead of ignoring your problems, resolve them. Act before they become chronic and start sapping your energy. (4) Don't “veg” on TV. Too much television dulls you mentally and lulls you into lethargy, but “they that wait upon the Lord...renew their strength” (Isa 40:31). (5) If you're overloaded, don't take on more. Don't say yes out of a sense of guilt, false responsibility, or the need to be needed. (6) Take a break. When did you last take time to get away? A change of pace and fresh scenery are great battery-chargers. (7) Get to bed earlier. When you burn the candle at both ends, you are the one who burns out. You say, “But I'm doing it for the Lord.” Notice what the Lord says: “It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late...for so He gives His beloved sleep” (Ps 127:2 NKJV).

Saturday July 17

“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me.” Mt 11:29 NKJV

Pace Yourself (2)

Galileo said, “I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason and intellect, has intended us to forego their use.” When Jesus says, “My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Mt 11:30 NKJV), His intention for you is to discover His will for your life, unlock and develop the gifts He’s given you, draw daily on His power, use your common sense, and don’t live stressed out. That means:

(1) Change your attitude. Ever notice how some people on a rollercoaster close their eyes, clench their teeth and wait for the ride to end, while up front the wide-eyed thrill-seekers relish every peak and plunge? They’re all on the same trip, but their attitudes are entirely different. You can’t always control what happens to you, but you can decide how you’ll respond to it. For instance, choosing to see problems as opportunities for growth develops you instead of draining you. (2) Get physical. “Physical exercise has...value” (1Ti 4:8 GNT). You don’t have to drive forty minutes to a health club, then wait thirty minutes to get on a treadmill for twenty minutes. Just start walking. A brisk walk works wonders for you physically and mentally. Come on, get moving! (3) Tap into the power of God’s Word. Practice scriptural affirmations: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col 3:16 NIV). But before that can happen you must feed your mind with the Scriptures, then meditate on them until they take root and grow within you. That way they’ll be there when you need them!

Sunday July 18

“Those...hired last...you paid...the same as...us.” Mt 20:12 NCV

Performance-Based or Grace-Based?

In Christ’s parable five different groups of workers are hired. The first group complained when those who worked only the last hour, got paid the same wages as those who worked all day. They are typical of performance-based Christians. They think that because they avoid certain sins, God’s getting a good deal. Instead of rejoicing with those who come late to the kingdom, they’re resentful. They’re easy to spot because they’ve three characteristics: (1) A complaining spirit. They overlook the good, zero in on the negative, and seek out people who agree with them. What’s the cure? A good memory! Recalling what God has done for you, and all the grace-based benefits of His love you enjoy each day. (2) A resentful spirit. Instead of resting in God’s grace they act like duty-bound soldiers—conscripts, not volunteers. They struggle constantly for God’s approval, never feel like they measure up, and their hostility prevents them from experiencing joy. But the moment they begin to reflect on God’s goodness to them, their resentment begins to lessen. (3) A judgmental spirit. “It’s not fair,” they think. “I did the work and they get the credit.” They forget that God dispenses gifts—not wages. He “does not...repay us according to our iniquities” (Ps 103:10 NIV), but lavishes us with grace and mercy. So who are these grace-based Christians? Latecomers with no contracts or merits; their relationship with God is based solely on grace. They’re happy with whatever He’s offering, humbled by His goodness, and motivated to work by overwhelming gratitude.

Monday July 19

“The integrity of the honest keeps them on track.” Pr 11:3 TM

Strive for Integrity, Not Popularity!

Joseph said no to the advances of Potiphar’s wife, not because he thought he couldn’t get away with it, but because he knew he couldn’t live with himself if he said yes. Ted Engstrom writes: “The world needs people who cannot be bought; whose word is their bond; who put character above wealth; who possess opinions and a will; who are larger than their vocations; who don’t hesitate to take chances; who won’t lose their individuality in a crowd; who will be as honest in small things as they are in great things; who will make no compromise with wrong; whose ambitions are not confined to their own selfish desires; who will not say they do it ‘because everybody else does it;’ who are true to their friends through good report and evil report, in adversity as well as in prosperity; who do not believe that shrewdness, cunning and hard-heartedness are the best qualities for winning success; who are not afraid to stand for the truth even when it’s unpopular; who say ‘no’ with emphasis, even though the rest of the world says ‘yes.’”

In what he calls a compromise of integrity, psychiatrist Leo Randall analyzes the relationship between former President Nixon and some of his closest confidants in the Watergate scandal. He records a conversation between Senator Howard Baker and Nixon aide Herbert Porter: Baker: “Did you ever have qualms about what you were doing?” Porter: “No!” Baker: “Why?” Porter: “Group pressure. I was afraid of not being considered a team player.” So strive for integrity, not popularity!

Tuesday July 20

“The race is not to the swift.” Ecc 9:11 NKJV

Keep the Torch Burning!

In ancient Greek marathons a torch was handed to each runner at the starting line. To win, they had to cross the finish line with their torch still burning. What a picture! “Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required” (Lk 12:48). In God’s kingdom you are called to run your best race and break the tape with the fire in your heart still burning. The torch race was a tough one that led through mountains and valleys. Doubtless there were times when others would pass you by, when your strength would fail, when you lost your way and had to get back on track, or stumbled and had to get back up. What counted in this race was not style—but staying power!

The Bible says: “Run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus...lest you become weary and discouraged” (Heb 12:1-3 NKJV). How did Jesus run His race? As a boy of twelve He told His parents, “I must be about my Father’s business” (Lk 2:49). Later, when the crowd tried to take Him in a different direction and impose their agenda on Him, He said, “I must work the works of him that sent me” (Jn 9:4). Facing the cross, He announced, “For this cause I was born” (Jn 18:37 NKJV). On the cross, He announced, “It is finished” (Jn 19:30). In Revelation chapter one verse fourteen we get one of our last recorded glimpses of Christ, and “His eyes [are] like a flame of fire” (NKJV). He crossed the finish line with the torch still burning. And He is your example!

Wednesday July 21

“Live joyfully with the wife whom you love.” Ecc 9:9 NKJV

Marriage Rights (1)

Sonja Ely writes: “I was watching my five-year-old granddaughter play with her toys. At one point she staged a wedding, first playing the role of the mother who assigned specific duties, then suddenly becoming the bride with her ‘teddy bear’ groom. She picked him up and said to the ‘minister’ presiding, ‘Now you can read us our rights.’ Without missing a beat, she became the minister who said, ‘You have the right to remain silent, anything you say may be held against you, you have the right to have an attorney present, you may kiss the bride.’” To know what your marriage rights are, you must understand that:

(1) Marriage is God’s idea. In Eden He said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him” (Ge 2:18 NKJV). The word comparable means “compatible with his (or her) needs.” When you marry someone, you marry everything they’ve been through. Each of you brings your own baggage. Unless you sort out what to keep and what to discard, things can quickly erode. (2) When you leave God out, you have problems. Satan has made marriage one of his prime targets. He loves to promote strife. When it comes to marriage we must learn to forgive, “Lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2Co 2:11 NKJV). God’s plan for your relationship is strength and harmony, not strife and confusion. He wants to help you build a strong, loving union that glorifies Him. To do that, you must show grace, and resolve to make Jesus Lord of your relationship.

Thursday July 22

“Live joyfully with the wife whom you love.” Ecc 9:9 NKJV

Marriage Rights (2)

In discussing marriage on his TV sitcom, Jerry Seinfeld tells his friend why he’s not married: “No healthy person would want the neglect I have to offer.” Let’s face it, even the best marriages are made up of two imperfect people who sometimes neglect each other. And when you’ve been hurt it’s easy to react in the flesh instead of responding in the Spirit. Some hurts go deep. At this point we must remember that forgiveness is a decision, but trust is a process; when it’s been torn down, it takes time to rebuild. Men and women often perceive trust differently. When a woman’s been hurt, her husband may think an apology should immediately enable her to trust him again, move on, and not talk about it. That’s not so; two things need to happen first:

(1) The offending partner needs to acknowledge what they’ve done. Don’t just tell your mate to “get over it.” Validate their feelings, even though they act like they don’t want you to. Acknowledge their pain. When others rationalize or trivialize what’s hurting us, it only makes us angrier. Only when we feel validated do our wounds begin to heal. (2) The offended partner needs to make sure that bitterness doesn’t creep in. “How can I do that?” you ask. By refusing to stay hurt any longer than is absolutely necessary, and by allowing God to heal your heart and restore your love. The Bible says, “If you hear his voice today, don’t be stubborn” (Heb 4:7 CEV). When God gives you the grace to forgive and release the hurt, you need to seize it!

Friday July 23

“Live joyfully with the wife whom you love.” Ecc 9:9 NKJV

Marriage Rights (3)

After the death of the child David fathered with Bathsheba, we read, “Then David got up...washed himself...changed his clothes...went to the Tabernacle and worshiped the Lord. After that, he returned to the palace and...ate. His advisers were amazed. ‘We don’t understand you,’ they told him. ‘While the [baby] was still living, you wept and refused to eat. But now that the [baby] is dead, you have stopped your mourning and are eating again’” (2Sa 12:20-21 NLT). Why did David mourn more intensely before the baby died than he did after? Because men grieve hard, but not necessarily as long. Once something’s over, they’ve a tendency to move on. This can cause problems. Often men genuinely don’t understand why their wives can’t accept that “what’s done is done,” and move on too. Listen to David’s logic: “I fasted and wept while the child was alive, for I said, ‘Perhaps the Lord will be gracious to me and let the child live.’ But why should I fast when he is dead? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him one day, but he cannot return to me” (2Sa 12:22-23 NLT). The Bible says God “comforts us...so that...When [others] are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort” (2Co 1:4 NLT). David’s next move was crucial. He “comforted Bathsheba, his wife” (2Sa 12:24 NLT). Notice, David didn’t ask, “What’s wrong with you? When are you going to get over this?” He recognized that even though he was beginning to heal, his wife was still hurting. The healing process accelerates once you begin to empathize with, and comfort your mate.

Saturday July 24

“Live joyfully with the wife whom you love.” Ecc 9:9 NKJV

Marriage Rights (4)

When your mate loses their job and you find yourself suddenly going through a season of financial uncertainty, here are three things you need to keep in mind:

(1) Remember, it’s just a season. The important thing is to guard your attitude while you’re waiting for things to turn around. Unless he’s lazy or an outright freeloader, your husband already feels bad because he can’t provide. He knows the kids need shoes, the bills are piling up and that you’re tired of eating hamburgers and macaroni, so don’t keep reminding him! (2) Now is the time to get behind him and strengthen his ego, not deflate it. “How?” you ask. By asking yourself, “Am I always complaining? Do I highlight the things we don’t have? Do I covet stuff that’s beyond our budget right now? Am I doing my part to cut back and make ends meet, or am I splurging on non-essentials, shopping at the mall every day and wanting to eat out every night?” (3) Remember, “this too shall pass.” Now is not a good time to remind your husband (or your wife if she’s the breadwinner) about the new car your brother bought or the great house your friend just closed on. Now is the time to practice saying with Paul, “I have learned to be satisfied with the things I have and with everything that happens...I have learned the secret of being [content]” (Php 4:11-12 NCV). Has God ever failed you? No, and He won’t now, so make up your mind to trust Him. How you handle this season may well determine whether your relationship emerges weaker or stronger.

Sunday July 25

“Live joyfully with the wife whom you love.” Ecc 9:9 NKJV

Marriage Rights (5)

You say, “My mate is a terrible housekeeper. What can I do?” Although keeping house is historically seen as a woman’s responsibility, today roles have changed. Financial necessity may dictate that you both work outside the home. In many instances the husband helps run the house. It’s not a “right or wrong” issue; what’s important is that you make sure you’re both singing from the same song sheet concerning your expectations. When you expect one thing and your mate expects another, there’s trouble ahead! So, here are a few suggestions to help you:

(1) Pick the right time. Don’t discuss difficult issues when you’re upset, wait till you both feel better. The Bible says, “Be willing to listen and slow to speak...anger will not help” (Jas 1:19-20 NCV). When emotions run high, instead of solving problems you just end up making things worse. (2) Try to compromise. Look for middle ground. Recognize that what seems important to you may not be important to your mate. Maybe it wasn’t important to you either in the early days, so you let it slide. (3) Learn to negotiate or you’ll always be frustrated. Aim for a “win-win” solution. This may mean washing the dishes or helping put the kids to bed so you can have more time together. It involves giving on both sides. (4) Pray with and for one another. Ninety percent of couples today don’t do this, yet it’s the most important thing you can do, because Jesus said, “If two of you agree...concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven” (Mt. 18:19 NKJV).

Monday July 26

“Live joyfully with the wife whom you love.” Ecc 9:9 NKJV

Marriage Rights (6)

Men and women often speak a different language. Men tend to be physical while women tend to be more verbal. Sometimes a wife’s memory for details can make her husband wonder if he’s losing his mind. And when you don’t understand each other it can feel like you’re living in the Tower of Babel. That’s the place in the Old Testament where families were divided because they couldn’t understand each other’s language, all progress stopped and confusion reigned. Before that happens, here are a few basics you need to weave into your daily communication:

(1) Start by asking your partner to share why they do what they do, and say what they say. Study their methods of communication, and try to explain yours. In many instances you’ll be surprised, if not shocked. You may be saying one thing while your mate is hearing something entirely different. (2) Men tend to avoid confrontation, so cornering and interrogating your husband may bring you the opposite result to what you want. Solomon said, “It is better to dwell in a corner of a housetop, than in a house shared with a contentious woman” (Pr 25:24 NKJV). The goal is to win your mate over, not win the argument. (3) The Bible says, “God...brings into existence what did not exist before” (See Ro 4:17 NLT). The love you planned to show once your partner has changed, show it now, be patient, and watch things improve. Grace can transform your Tower of Babel into a home of love and unity. Ask God, He’ll show you how!

Tuesday July 27

“Live joyfully with the wife whom you love.” Ecc 9:9 NKJV

Marriage Rights (7)

What if you're single, looking for a mate and haven't found one yet? God created Eve specifically for Adam. Then, “He brought her to the man. And Adam said: ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh’” (Ge 2:22-23 NKJV). When God brings you the right person, a spiritual and emotional bonding will take place. When you try to get ahead of Him you end up with regrets and recriminations. Peter de Vries explained it this way: “The difficulty with marriage is that we fall in love with a personality, but must live with a character.” So, wait on God!

When God looked across eternity He saw you. He gave you certain traits and abilities that make you unique. He knew exactly who you would need to help fulfill His purposes and develop the gifts He's given you. Until that happens, remember, He is your spiritual partner! He's been caring for you all along: protecting you, providing for you and directing your steps, right? So be careful how you treat Him. If you can't keep your vow to the Lord, it's doubtful you'll keep it to anybody else. Speaking to those who are single, Paul writes, “Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called...Do not be concerned about it...rather use it” (1Co 7:20-21 NKJV). Stop wrestling with your singleness and use this time to develop your relationship with God. Never forget that one of the greatest visitations of the Holy Spirit happened to a single, small-town girl named Mary, proving that when you trust God's timing He always sends you the best!

Wednesday July 28

“Lazy people want much but get little, but those who work hard will prosper.” Pr 13:4 NLT
Give It All You've Got!

By the time she was sixteen, Romana Bañuelos had been deserted by her husband and left to raise her two children alone. Living in Mexico, she was poverty-stricken, untrained in any profession and unable to speak English. But that didn't stop her. She had a dream—one she refused to let go of. With only a few dollars in her pocket she headed for Los Angeles, where she used her last seven dollars to take a taxi to the home of a distant relative. Romana refused to live on the charity of others. Immediately she found a job washing dishes, followed by a second job making tortillas from midnight until 6 a.m. From her two jobs she was able to save five hundred dollars, which she used to invest in her own tortilla machine. Over time, and with a great deal of hard work and study, she became the owner of Ramona's Mexican Food Products, the largest Mexican food products business in the world. And that's not all. She was hand-picked by President Dwight Eisenhower to become the thirty-seventh United States Treasurer. Romana Bañuelos exemplified what Eisenhower had to say about dreams and discipline propelling our future: “We succeed only as we identify in life, or in war, or in anything else, a single overriding objective, and make all other considerations bend to that one objective.” Whether you flip burgers or trade futures, remember these words: “Lazy people want much but get little, but those who work hard will prosper.” God will only add His blessing to your best effort, so today, give it all you've got!

Thursday July 29

“These are the children [the Lord] has given me.” Ge 33:5 NCV

Your Child’s Love

It’s easy to complain about the things you don’t have, and overlook or take for granted the things you do—simple things that enrich your life! Maybe this story by Dr. James Dobson will help change your perspective.

“Some time ago a friend of mine punished his three-year-old daughter for wasting a roll of gold wrapping paper. Money was tight and he became upset when she tried to decorate a box to put under the Christmas tree. Nevertheless, the little girl brought the gift to her father the next morning and said, ‘This is for you, Daddy.’ He was embarrassed by his earlier over-reaction. But his anger flared again when he opened the box and found it empty. He shouted at her, ‘Don’t you know that when you give someone a present there’s supposed to be something inside?’ The little girl looked up at him in tears and said, ‘Oh, Daddy, it’s not empty. I blew kisses into it. I filled it with my love and I wrapped it up just for you.’ He was crushed. Quickly he put his arms around her, hugged her and asked for her forgiveness. My friend told me that he kept that gold box by his bed for years, and whenever he got discouraged he’d take out an imaginary kiss and remember the love of the child who had put it in there. In a very real sense, each of us parents have been given a gold container filled with the unconditional love of our children. There’s not a more precious possession anyone could hold.”

Friday July 30

“Shamgar...killed six hundred...Philistines with an ox goad.” Jdg 3:31 NKJV

Shamgar’s Secret (1)

The Bible says, “Shamgar...killed six hundred...Philistines with an ox goad; and he also delivered Israel.” Shamgar was just a farmer who owned a field, but he was willing to fight for it. His odds weren’t good: six hundred to one. But he beat the odds, saved his field, and delivered Israel. So you can start out small and end up blessing others greatly. The Bible says, “Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin” (Zec 4:10 NLT). Every oak tree started as an acorn. Tom Monaghan started Domino’s Pizza in 1960 with one little shop. He struggled for eight years. When his shop burned to the ground, the insurance company paid him only one cent on the dollar to cover his losses. All he knew was pizza, so he started another shop. He worked a hundred hours a week. Up to this point he had only taken a one-week-long vacation—for his honeymoon. By 1971 he was 1.5 million dollars in debt. But he stayed in his field, which was the pizza business, and tried something new. He limited his menu to pizza only, and decided to deliver it hot and fresh to customers at no extra charge. It worked. By 2007, Domino’s Pizza had grown to 6,100 stores across the United States and other countries. Today he’s one of the richest men in the nation, and he gives most of his profits to charity. What was his secret? He started where he was. He fought for what he believed to be his God-given purpose. And when he got knocked down he got back up.

Saturday July 31

“Shamgar...killed six hundred...Philistines with an ox goad.” Jdg 3:31 NKJV

Shamgar’s Secret (2)

Shamgar lived in dangerous times. Philistine gangs roamed the countryside, robbing people: “In the days of Shamgar...people avoided the main roads; and travelers stayed on...pathroads” (Jdg 5:6 NLT). Shamgar’s only weapon was an ox goad, a long wooden staff with a steel tip used to prod oxen. But it wasn’t until he came under attack that he discovered its full potential. Understand this: God has given you an “ox goad”, something you can use to win in the situation you’re facing. If you seek Him, He’ll show you what it is. Like the boy with the five loaves and two fishes, God will take something small, bless it, then multiply it to bless others. The Bible says we are to “be instant in season, out of season” (2Ti 4:2). The Greek words for “be instant” could be translated “be prepared.” The Greek word for “season” means “opportunity.” You need to be preparing yourself now, when it looks like nothing is happening, because your season will change and the opportunity to act will suddenly present itself. When it does, you must be ready. In life, opportunities are either coming towards you, or passing you by. In college, a professor told Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. that if he kept using such lofty words, he would never be a very effective public speaker. You have to wonder what that professor thought as he listened to Dr. King’s “I have a dream” speech, and watched him go on to champion civil rights. What’s your ox goad? Use it, and God will bless it!

Sunday August 1

“He chose them to become like his Son.” Ro 8:29 NLT

Do Others See Jesus in You?

Bill was a drunk, converted in a Skid Row mission. Before his conversion he had gained a reputation as a derelict and a wino for whom there was no hope. But when he gave his life to Christ everything changed. He became the most caring person at the mission. He spent his days there doing whatever needed to be done. There was never anything he was asked to do that he considered beneath him. Whether it was cleaning up vomit left by some sick alcoholic or scrubbing toilets used by men who had left them filthy, Bill did it all with a heart of gratitude. He could be counted on to feed any man who wandered in off the streets, undress him and tuck him into bed when he was too out-of-it to take care of himself. One evening after the mission director delivered his evangelistic message to the usual crowd of solemn men with drooped heads, one of them came down to the altar and kneeled to pray, crying out for God to help him change. The repentant drunk kept shouting, “O God, make me like Bill! Make me like Bill! Make me like Bill!” The director of the mission leaned over and said, “Wouldn’t it be better if you prayed, ‘Make me like Jesus?’” After thinking about it for a few seconds, the man looked up and asked, “Is He like Bill?” Live, so that others see Jesus in you!

Monday August 2

“You’re after...truth from the inside out.” Ps 51:6 TM

Secrets (1)

Lisa Whittle says: “Pornography...excessive shopping...eating disorders develop in isolation...What we watch...think...how we spend our time are the ‘secret places’ Satan uses. It’s not that we don’t want to be honest...but fear of being discovered keeps us...[trapped]...If Satan can get us to...bury our secret[s]...we can’t be effective for God...our private sins will eat away at us, making us feel fraudulent and unworthy...The truth is we’re the ones who don’t love and accept ourselves, not God! ‘What is hidden he brings to light’ (Job 28:11 NKJV) because He’s ‘after...truth from the inside out.’” So:

Practice honesty. When you catch yourself in a lie, stop, admit it and apologize. It’s embarrassing, but you’ll think twice next time! Develop a strong faith. Make authenticity a top priority. Strengthen your walk with God through daily prayer and Bible-reading. Consider your motivation. Make sure the improvements you’re working on in your life aren’t just to impress others. Appreciate your God-given attributes. Make a list, stop and look at it when you feel “less-than.” Value your own judgment. Consider what you’ve already accomplished and the good decisions you’ve made in the past. Dr. Edwin Locke says, “Think independently...be mindful of what’s suitable for you regardless of what the rest of the world says.” Stop trying to be perfect or look super spiritual. Openness means living without pretense and giving others permission to be transparent. Remember, seemingly “together people” have their not-so-together moments, and falling apart is sometimes how you get put back together. Live with a genuineness others will want to emulate. Honesty facilitates honesty. When you’re real, people can tell.

Tuesday August 3

“I’ll make a clean breast of my failures to God.” Ps 32:5 TM

Secrets (2)

Hidden among the sand dunes on Bird Island, North Carolina, is a regular mailbox marked “Kindred Spirits.” Inside are notebooks and pencils visitors can use to record their thoughts and prayers in anonymity. Author Zoë Elmore says: “I’m amazed what people have written...heart wrenching confessions...their deepest and darkest secrets...prayers of desperation...People...willing to put down...things they’d never share with family or friends...and place them in a mailbox on a secluded island. These writings are an indication of everyone’s need to be heard in a safe environment...to get things off our chest without interruption or condemnation. As a child of God we have a true Kindred Spirit to whom we can pour out our hearts...His name is Jesus and you just have to call on Him...He’s waiting to listen to your innermost fears and private thoughts. Perhaps you have things you’re longing to share; secrets you’ve kept far too long...I have great news...it’s possible to experience freedom—without visiting Bird Island! Call on the Name of Jesus...pour out your heart with confident abandon...He’s present and He’s listening.” When you do that, David said: “You get a fresh start, your slate’s wiped clean...God holds nothing against you and you’re holding nothing back from him. When I kept it all inside...The pressure never let up...Then I let it all out...said, ‘I’ll make a clean breast of my failures to God.’ Suddenly the pressure was gone—my guilt dissolved...my sin disappeared” (Ps 32:1-5 TM). What a great feeling!

Wednesday August 4

“Set free [from] the fear of dying.” Heb 2:15 NLT

Set Free from the Fear of Dying

Joe Bayly, who lost three sons, says, “At the hospital [after] we buried our five-year-old... I saw a little boy playing on the floor. ‘He has the same problem your son had,’ the secretary said. I sat down next to his mother. ‘It’s hard bringing him here for tests, isn’t it?’ I said. ‘Hard! I die every time,’ her voice trailed off. ‘It’s good to know,’ I spoke slowly, choosing my words carefully, ‘that although the medical outlook is hopeless, after our children die they’ll be removed from suffering and be well and happy.’ She replied, ‘If only I could believe that, but I don’t. I’ll just have to cover him up with dirt and forget I ever had him.’” Bayly wanted to be alone with his grief, but he felt compelled to speak. “‘I’m glad I don’t feel that way. We covered our little boy with dirt yesterday, and I’m here today to thank the doctor for his kindness.’ She replied, ‘You look like a rational person. How can you possibly believe the death of a man or a little boy is any different from the death of an animal?’”

Max Lucado writes, “Heaven enjoys a maternity-ward reaction...angels watch, the way grandparents monitor delivery-room doors...They can’t wait to see the new arrival. While we’re driving hearses...they’re hanging streamers...Jesus came to ‘free all...who...lived...as slaves to the fear of dying’ (See Heb 2:15). Heaven knows no untimely death. David said, ‘Before I was born...Every day of my life was recorded in your book’ (Ps 139:16 NLT). Fear and dread end when you know that heaven is your true home.”

Thursday August 5

“I am...discouraged, but I will remember you.” Ps 42:6 NLT

When You’re Disappointed

Max Lucado says, “When God doesn’t do what we want it’s not easy; it never has been, and it never will be. Faith is the conviction that God knows more than us...and he’ll get us through. Disappointment is caused by unmet expectations...and it’s cured by revamped expectations...Don’t panic...don’t give up...be patient...God’s in control. It ain’t over till it’s over.” So, when you’re disappointed: (a) Look inward. David asked, “Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad?” (Ps 42:5 NLT). Admit how you feel. You can’t deal with what you don’t acknowledge. Ask God to show you the root of the problem. Is it pent-up anger? Envy? Unforgiveness? Pride? Lust? Physical and mental fatigue? Be open to what He reveals. (b) Look upward. David said, “I will...hope in God! I will praise him” (v. 5). Instead of focusing on your discouragement, focus on the One who knows the way out. (c) Remember God’s past faithfulness. David said, “I am...discouraged, but I will remember you.” Through every trial Joseph clung to the assurance that God still controlled his destiny. Recalling God’s faithfulness builds your confidence that He’ll continue to provide. (d) Remember, you don’t have to understand. Just because you can’t figure out what God’s doing right now, doesn’t mean it won’t make sense later. He “causes all things to work together for good to those who love [Him]” (Ro 8:28 NAS). (e) Don’t give in to bitterness. When your hopes are dashed, resentment can set in. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Ro 8:31 NKJV). Regardless of how deep the pit may seem, God is on your side!

Friday August 6

“Make allowance for each other’s faults.” Col 3:13 NLT

Make Allowance (1)

When it comes to forgiving, you can’t say it better than Tim Stafford did: “I would rather be cheated a hundred times, than develop a heart of stone.” The Bible says, “Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you.” You don’t get to choose who you’ll forgive. Love is a command, forgiveness is an act of obedience. “He has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother” (1Jn 4:21 NIV). You can’t be closer to God than you are to the people you love least. God sets the bar high because grudges are like cancer, and forgiveness is the laser that removes them. Bitterness chains us to the past, destroys families, divides churches and sours relationships. Forgiveness is the key that unlocks the handcuffs of hate. Take your hurt feelings to God and say, “Point out anything...that offends you” (Ps 139:24 NLT). It takes courage, but that’s the kind of prayer He answers. It gets easier as you grow in Christ; in the meantime you have to work at it. As a child of God His Spirit lives inside you. You’re no longer a slave to sin (See Ro 6:14). God knows it’s hard to forgive deep-seated hurts, but He will give you grace to do it. To “make allowance” means to take a charitable view and consider extenuating circumstances. People change and grow over time, so don’t insist on clinging to a limited, outdated view of them. Try to see them as they are today. Most folks are doing their best based on the knowledge and understanding they have now, so give them a break!

Saturday August 7

“Make allowance for each other’s faults.” Col 3:13 NLT

Make Allowance (2)

C. S. Lewis said, “Everyone thinks forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have something to forgive.” Author Mac Anderson writes: “A few times in my life I’ve been wronged. My first reaction...was anger and resentment. I...felt my stomach tie up in knots, my appetite wane, and the joy slip out of my life...like I’d played the first half of a basketball game in steel shoes. In the locker room the coach said, ‘Try these new Nikes in the second half.’ Multiply that by ten and you’ll understand how it feels to unload your emotional baggage through the power of forgiveness.” Jesus debunked the myth that love is based on feelings. It’s an act of your will, and if you love God you’ll keep His commandments. It’s that simple. If you’re struggling to forgive someone who’s hurt you, here are some scriptural guidelines to help you:

Don’t seek retribution. Instead, “Overcome evil with good” (Ro 12:21). God said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay” (Ro 12:19). Don’t rush to judgment. That’s not always easy when you’re the injured party, but the ultimate Judge said, “With what judgment you judge, you will be judged” (Mt 7:2 NKJV). Make things right. Jesus said, “Be reconciled to your brother” (Mt 5:24 NIV). Don’t wait for the other person to make the first move, you do it. Paul says, “Make every effort to live in peace with all men” (Heb 12:14 NIV). Pray for the offender. As much as it goes against your grain, when you “pray for those who mistreat you” (Lk 6:28 NIV), God gives you the grace to forgive and see them through His eyes.

Sunday August 8

“Cast your burden on the Lord.” Ps 55:22 NKJV

Time Out

A hiker with two heavy duffle bags was walking down a road in 90-degree heat. A truck driver stopped and told him to hop on. Later when the driver looked in his rearview mirror, the hiker was standing in the truck-bed still holding his bags! We smile, but as Jon Walker points out, many of us “stand in the truck of faith carrying our burdens, thinking they’re independent of the ride we’re taking. We think God can carry us but not our burdens... The Psalmist said, ‘Cast your burden on the Lord, and he shall sustain you.’ Rest in His power and grace... confident He’s looking out for your best interests. Rest requires dependence, and one sign that you’re not resting in God... is worry... the need to control... Next time you feel overwhelmed... settle into a chair, ‘Be still, and know that [He is] God’ (Ps 46:10).” In this instance, the command to “be still” comes from the word *rapha* which means... “to let go... release... and give up.” You’ve struggled long enough; give your burden to the Burden Bearer. Set it down! In order to do that you must do two things: (1) Practice saying no. If you’re constantly available you’ll end up stretched so thin you’ll be no good to anybody. Jesus didn’t try to please everybody. He prayed, got God’s agenda and stuck to it. God will give you the grace to do only what He has commanded, not what you think or what others would like. (2) Value solitude. Turn off your PDA, pager and cell phone. The sign of a well-ordered mind is the ability to sit quietly in one place and linger in your own company.

Monday August 9

“It was not you who sent me here, but God.” Ge 45:8 NIV

“But God” Moments

Are you in the dark about the direction God seems to be leading you? Jon Walker says: “The choice to do his will before we know the specifics... develops trust of his character... This is where many people get into a battle of wills... wanting him to reveal his plan first... That’s not how he works. God wants you to decide in advance to trust him... believing that his will is best for your life... He knows your hesitancy. He won’t be surprised if you say, ‘I don’t know that I’m willing to step out in faith without knowing everything that’s going to happen, but I’m willing to be made willing.’ One reason God doesn’t give you the full picture... is you may be overwhelmed... it may appear impossible... but that’s the point—there’s no way you can fulfill your mission without him.”

When Joseph was reunited with his brothers in Egypt, he told them, “Do not be angry with yourselves... it was not you who sent me here, but God” (vv. 5-8). Joseph’s brothers sold him out, “but God” used it to preserve the Jewish race. The Israelites were in slavery, “but God” sent Moses to lead them to the Promised Land. Jesus died on the cross, “but God” used His death to save a lost world. Oswald Chambers calls God “The Great Engineer, creating circumstances to bring about moments... of divine importance, leading us to divine appointments.” Think back; can’t you recall some “but God” moments of your own where you’d reached the end of your rope and He came through for you?

Tuesday August 10

“He will purify...and refine them like gold.” Mal 3:3 NIV

Walking in Purity

When gold is refined over extreme heat the first thing to come to the surface is dross. The next thing to be separated from it is silver, a less precious metal that blends with the raw gold ore. There's an important lesson here. Most of us are unable to separate the good from the best, so Malachi writes, “He will purify...and refine them like gold.” God does it, because we don't know how! After committing adultery with Bathsheba, David writes, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps 51:10 NKJV). David prays for two things: A clean heart and a steadfast desire to walk in purity.

Personal failure is usually the result of a slow, steady buildup, rather than a single act of disobedience. It happens when we focus on the wrong things and neglect our spiritual life. So God calls us to the place of solitude, a place with no distractions, in order to probe our deepest thoughts and open our eyes to certain issues that need attention. It's here He makes us aware of what we excuse, or try to hide from others. It's here the junk we've collected during the busy hours of our day gets filtered out. With the debris out of the way, we're able to see things more clearly and respond to God's nudgings. There's no way to have a deeper, more intimate relationship with God without the discipline James talks about: “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands...and purify your hearts” (Jas 4:8 NKJV).

Wednesday August 11

“I have never seen the righteous forsaken.” Ps 37:25 NIV

Are You Struggling Financially? (1)

For many who've lost their jobs or who don't earn enough to live on, debt has become a harsh reality. So much so, that they're afraid to even think about their situation. But burying your head in the sand isn't the answer. With God's help and some common-sense suggestions you can start moving toward financial freedom. A respected financial consultant offers these suggestions:

(1) Be truthful. Before you can change anything you need to know where your money's going. There's nothing to be ashamed of; like an alcoholic entering recovery, the first step is admitting you have a problem. On a 5x7 card jot down every dollar you spend for thirty days. It adds up quickly, “all...those little foxes...ruin the vineyard” (SS 2:15 NLT). By looking at the big picture, you'll see areas you can cut back. (2) Learn from your past experiences. If you don't learn from the past you'll keep repeating it. For example, if you didn't get a lot of Christmas gifts as a child, it can be tempting to overcompensate with your own kids and end up maxing out your credit cards. Or, growing up in an atmosphere of financial turmoil can make it difficult to talk about money with your spouse. (3) Value yourself more than your paycheck. Jesus said the important things in life aren't “things” (See Mt 6:25). Beating yourself up won't help you earn more; it'll just blind you to the real blessings in life. Remember, no matter how tough it gets, God is faithful. David said, “I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging,” and you won't either!

Thursday August 12

“God...will supply all your needs.” Php 4:19 NLT

Are You Struggling Financially? (2)

Here are a few more steps you can take to deal effectively with debt:

(1) Start digging yourself out. It’s disheartening to find bills piling up in your mailbox every day, but you need to know the bottom line. List your debts from the highest interest rate to the lowest. Try to pay as much as possible towards the highest and the minimum towards the rest. Make a start, no matter how long it takes; there’s too much at stake not to. (2) Model sound financial principles for your children. Be open with them and explain that electricity, food, toys, and clothes cost money. And the reason you’re not driving the latest car is because you can’t afford it. Your kids are making money memories now, so “teach them diligently” (Dt 6:7 NKJV). (3) “Give, and it will be given to you” (Lk 6:38 NAS). Suze Orman says: “One day I was in a terrible funk. I turned on the TV and happened to catch a fundraiser. I picked up the phone and pledged as much as I could. Those people needed money more than me. Immediately I felt like a burden had been lifted. From then on whenever I felt down, I’d give...and I’d feel better. Amazingly in every instance the amount was showered back on me tenfold.” The rewards of giving aren’t always financial; sometimes it’s the sense of freedom and purpose that comes from doing it. Plus, money should never be so important that you can’t let it go. Remember, by helping others you’re paving the way for God to “supply all your needs,” and His shovel is much bigger than yours!

Friday August 13

“God...is the...controller of all things.” 1Ti 6:15 PHPS

Rise Above Worry

We all worry from time to time, but wise people have learned to:

(1) Define the situation clearly. What exactly is it you’re worrying about? Be specific. Often when we take time to clarify the problem, a way to solve it will present itself.

(2) Face the worst that can happen. Would you lose your job? Your relationship? Your investment? In most cases even if the worst did happen, chances are it wouldn’t ruin you. It may be inconvenient or painful, but does it really warrant all the anxiety you’re giving it?

(3) Resolve to accept the outcome whatever it is. Most of the stress of worry comes from denial, from not being willing to face the worst that could happen. Once you make up your mind to accept whatever happens, you’ll find worry loses its power over you.

(4) Work to improve the situation. Renowned neurologist James H. Austin said, “Chance favors those in motion.” Do all you can to insure the best possible outcome, and “after you have done everything...stand” (Eph 6:13 NIV). Stand on God’s promises!

(5) Give the problem to God. He’s “the...controller of all things.” The Psalmist said, “Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you” (Ps 9:10 NIV). Remember, nothing can happen to you today, or any other day, that God is not aware of, in control of, and able to bring you through.

Saturday August 14

“Having believed, you were marked...with a seal.” Eph 1:13 NIV

The Deal is Sealed

If you are having doubts about your salvation, understand this clearly: The moment you trusted in Christ as your Savior, His blood cleansed you from all sin. At that point “you were marked...with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit...guaranteeing [your]...redemption” (vv. 13-14). The Bible says: “You are not to be like cowering fearful slaves. You should behave instead like God’s very own children, adopted into his family—calling him, ‘Father, dear Father!’ For the Holy Spirit speaks to us deep in our hearts and tells us we are God’s children. And since we are his children, we will share his treasures—for everything God gives to his son, Christ, is ours too” (Ro 8:15-16 NLT).

In the book of Ruth we read that “the custom...in Israel concerning redeeming...[was] one man took off his sandal...gave it to the other, and this was a confirmation” (Ru 4:7 NKJV). Notice, the “redeemer” put on another man’s sandal, signifying his willingness to stand in his place. That’s what Jesus did for us at the cross. He stood in our shoes so we could stand before God in His—redeemed and righteous! Don’t let doubt steal your joy. Refuse to go by your feelings. Make up your mind to believe what God says, for until you do you’ll be plagued by uncertainty. Study God’s Word till you can say with assurance, “I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day” (2Ti 1:12 NKJV). Are you trusting in Christ as your Savior? Then your salvation is not in doubt. The deal is sealed!

Sunday August 15

“The sin that so easily trips us up.” Heb 12:1 NLT

What’s Your Achilles’ Heel?

Achilles, the Greek hero of the Trojan War, was invulnerable, with one exception: his heel. Shoot him there and he’d go down. Guess what? He died from an arrow to the heel! We all have our Achilles’ heel—the “sin that so easily trips us up.” Here, blindness, indifference or denial sets us up for failure. So how do we overcome our Achilles’ heel? Author John Piper offers us a solution in the form of an acronym: ANTHEM.

A—avoid sights and situations that arouse unfitting desires. Prevent what fuels your appetite for sin. N—say No to every lustful thought within five seconds. In the first two seconds shout “No, get out of my head!” In the next two, cry out, “Oh God, in the name of Jesus, help me. Save me now. I am yours.” Say it out loud. The Puritan writer John Owen said, “Be killing sin, or it will be killing you.” T—turn the mind forcefully towards Christ. Attack sin with the promises of Christ. H—hold the promise and pleasure of Christ firmly in mind. For how long? Until it pushes other images out. Hold it. Don’t let it go. Hold it until you win! E—enjoy a superior satisfaction: Pleasure in Christ. If you have little taste for Jesus, competing pleasures will triumph. M—move into useful activity, away from idleness and other vulnerable behaviors. Abound in the work of the Lord (See 1Co 15:58). Replace deceitful lusts with a passion for good deeds. Today, using this simple acronym, you can move from vulnerability to victory by drawing on the power of God’s Spirit within you (See Gal 5:25).

Monday August 16

“The Lord is my shepherd.” Ps 23:1

Your Shepherd and Lord

Abraham Lincoln wrote, “I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My wisdom, and that of all about me, seemed insufficient for the day.” All of us feel that way at times. That’s because we are all sheep in need of a shepherd. Of all God’s creatures, sheep seem the least able to care for themselves. They’re directionless: they’ll walk off a cliff or wander into a river and drown. They’re defenseless: they’ve no claws so they can’t fight, run fast, or climb a tree to safety. They’re dirty: your cat and dog can clean themselves, but sheep get dirty and stay that way. You say, “I don’t like being compared to sheep.” Okay, then answer these questions: How well do you control your impulses? Do you ever play the victim? Can you relate to Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde? Are you always upbeat and upright? Do you add to the conflict and confusion, or do you always make peace? Do you truly love people, or do you just use them for your own ends? Are you generous, or do you mostly give to those who have something to give back to you? On a scale of one to ten, how do you score when it comes to the fear of people, or failure, or sickness, or death, or rejection, or risk? Is your life an open book? How often do you fail and need forgiveness: weekly? daily? hourly? It sounds like you need a shepherd! So instead of saying, “The Lord is my shepherd,” try saying, “Because I need a shepherd, I make You Lord of my life.”

Tuesday August 17

“I shall not want.” Ps 23:1

What You Really Want—Is the Lord!

Do you remember when all the stuff you now have, was stuff you only dreamed of? Now you realize that lasting joy doesn’t come from what you drive, deposit, or dwell in. The words, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want,” teach us that what we have in God, is greater than whatever else we don’t have. Here are two stories to help you realize that: Story one. While on a short-term missions trip, Pastor Jack Hinton was leading worship at a leper colony when a woman who’d been facing away from the pulpit suddenly turned around. “It was the most hideous face I’d ever seen,” Hinton said. Her nose and ears were entirely gone. She lifted a fingerless hand in the air and asked, “Can we sing ‘Count Your Many Blessings?’” Overcome, Hinton left the service. He was followed by a team member who said, “I guess you’ll never be able to sing that song again.” “Yes, I will,” he replied, “but I’ll never sing it the same way.” Story two. Doug McKnight was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis at thirty-two. Over the next sixteen years it would cost him his career, his mobility, and eventually his life. But he never lost his sense of gratitude. When his church friends asked him to compile a list of prayer requests, he responded by sending them eighteen blessings for which to be grateful and six concerns for which to be prayerful. His blessings were three times greater than his needs! Doug McKnight discovered that what he had in God was greater than whatever else he didn’t have in life. Have you discovered that yet?

Wednesday August 18

“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.” Ps 23:2

You’ll Accomplish More, by Learning to Do Less

Are you like the guy who said, “The Devil never takes a vacation, so why should I?” Since when did the Devil become your role model? The words, “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures,” teach us that only the shepherd can choose the path, prepare the pasture, and protect us. Our role is simply to follow, feed and fellowship with Him. Getting the idea?

Of the ten commandments God gave to Moses, which one do you think required the most words? Adultery? No, that only took five words. Murder? No, that only took four words. The longest of the Ten Commandments is about taking a day off: ninety-six words! (See Ex 20:8-11). God knows us so well: He knew the store owner would say, “Somebody’s got to work that day; if I can’t my son will.” So God says, “Nor thy son.” “Then my daughter will.” “Nor thy daughter.” “Then an employee.” “Nor thy manservant.” God says, “One day a week you’ll say no to work and yes to worship. You’ll slow down, sit down, lie down and rest. After all, I rested on the seventh day and the world didn’t crash. So repeat after me, ‘It’s not my job to run the world.’” Charles Spurgeon said, “Even the sea pauses at ebb and flood; earth keeps the Sabbath of the wintery months, and man must rest or faint, trim his lamp or let it burn low. In the long term we shall do more, by sometimes doing less.” Bottom line: if you honor God’s principles you will find rest for your body, mind and emotions.

Thursday August 19

“He leadeth me beside the still waters.” Ps 23:2

God Will “Be There” for You

Philip Yancey says, “Faith means trusting in advance, what will only make sense in reverse.” If you fear the future, look back and see how God took care of you in the past. “This I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness... The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him” (La 3:21-25 NIV). You say, “I don’t know what I’ll do if my loved one dies.” You will—when the time comes. You say, “I don’t know how I’ll pay these bills.” Jehovah Jireh, the Lord who provides, will be there—when the time comes. You say, “I’m not qualified to handle this, there’s too much I don’t know.” Maybe you want to know everything too soon. God will give you wisdom—when the time comes. The key is to meet today’s problems with today’s strength, and leave tomorrow in God’s hands. During WWII, Arthur Sulzberger, publisher of The New York Times, found it hard to sleep or rid his mind of fear until he adopted these words from the hymn “Lead, Kindly Light”: “I do not ask to see the distant scene; one step enough for me.” And God isn’t going to let you see the distant scene either. No, He promises a lamp for your feet, not a crystal ball for your future. “He leadeth me” and that’s enough for today. And tomorrow? “We will find grace to help us when we need it” (Heb 4:16 NLT).

Friday August 20

“He restoreth my soul [peace of mind].” Ps 23:3

Have You Lost Your Peace of Mind?

When life overwhelms us we usually look for one of two things: (1) Somebody with all the answers. The trouble is, when you look to someone for that which only God can provide, you set that person up to fail and yourself up to be disappointed. (2) Somewhere with fewer problems. Paul Harvey wrote: “After Hurricane Andrew devastated South Florida, Patricia Christy vowed she was going to leave on the first plane. She was determined to get as far away from the horror of hurricane damage as she possibly could and have a restful vacation.” Harvey said, “I just heard from Patricia Christy. She was standing in line for fresh water on the Hawaiian Island Kauai, having just gone through Hurricane Iniki!”

Sheep get anxious when storms come, predators roar, or they’re forced to move to unfamiliar territory. How do they handle such times? By moving closer to the shepherd! Have you lost your peace of mind today? Read the following Scriptures; they’ll help you move closer to your Shepherd: “But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them” (Ps 5:11 NKJV). “The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Dt 33:27 NIV). “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You” (Isa 26:3 NKJV). “The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him” (Na 1:7 NKJV). For, “The Lord remembers us and will bless us” (Ps 115:12 NIV).

Saturday August 21

“He leads me in the paths of righteousness.” Ps 23:3 NKJV

Made Righteous Through Christ

How could a God who is perfect live side by side in heaven with people like us who aren’t? That’s like asking if Harvard could admit a third-grade dropout. Then what are we to do? Find a worthy substitute, or be lost forever! That’s where Jesus comes in; He’s the Good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep. It’s the great transfer! At the cross God placed all our sins on Christ, and at the point of believing faith He places all Christ’s righteousness on us. Awesome!

Actor Kevin Bacon recalls when his six-year-old son saw the movie Footloose for the first time: “‘Hey, Dad, you know that part in the movie where you swing from the rafters? That’s really cool, how did you do that?’ I said, ‘Well, I didn’t do that part...it was a stuntman.’ ‘What’s a stuntman?’ he asked. ‘That’s someone who dresses like me and does things I can’t do.’ ‘Oh,’ he replied and walked out of the room looking a little confused. Later he said, ‘Hey, Dad, you know that part in the movie where you spin around on that gym bar and land on your feet? How did you do that?’ I said, ‘Well, I didn’t do that either. That was a gymnastics double.’ ‘What’s a gymnastics double?’ he asked. ‘That’s a guy who dresses in my clothes and does things I can’t do.’ Then his son asked, ‘Dad, what did you do?’ ‘I got all the glory,’ I sheepishly replied.” The songwriter put it this way: “Dressed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before Thy throne. On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.”

Sunday August 22

“For his name’s sake.” Ps 23:3

It’s All About Him!

Ever ask, “How could God use someone like me?” The Psalmist answers, “For his name’s sake”! Only one name counts—and it’s not yours! With the same intensity that God hates pride, He loves humility. His Word says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (Jas 4:6 NIV). So here are a few tips on staying humble:

(1) Evaluate yourself honestly. Don’t be like the beaver who told the rabbit as they stared up at the immense wall of Hoover Dam, “No, I didn’t actually build it myself. But it was based on an idea of mine.” The Bible says, “Don’t cherish exaggerated ideas of yourself...but try to have a sane estimate of your capabilities” (Ro 12:3-4 PHPS). (2) Learn to celebrate others. Paul writes, “Don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves” (Php 2:3 NLT). Every goal scored in life is usually a team effort. Be like the little boy who came home from the tryouts for the school play and announced, “Mommy, I got the part. I’ve been chosen to sit in the audience and cheer.” When you can do that, your head finally fits your hat size. (3) Don’t announce your success before it occurs. “One who puts on his armor should not boast like one who takes it off” (1Ki 20:11 NIV). When one of Charles Spurgeon’s students proudly stepped up to preach, but came back down having failed miserably, Spurgeon supposedly said something like, “If you’d gone up the way you came down, you’d have come down the way you went up.” God blesses our efforts only when they’re done “for his name’s sake.”

Monday August 23

“Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me.” Ps 23:4 NKJV

Facing Death with Confidence

One day Jesus will come and take each of us to His house. “How do we get there?” you ask. “Through the valley of the shadow of death.” This verse is quoted at the graves of paupers and carved on the headstones of presidents, because:

(1) We must all face death. A group of senior citizens was lounging on the patio of their retirement community. One looked up as a large flock of birds flew overhead. He nudged his buddy who’d dozed off: “Frank, you’d better move around a little, those buzzards look like they’re closing in on us.” The Bible says, “It is appointed unto men once to die” (Heb 9:27). Sooner or later the buzzards will move in; will you be ready? (2) We don’t have to face it alone. Donna Spratt writes: “To begin a discussion on values, our youth pastor asked the teens this question: ‘What would you do if your doctor told you you had only twenty-four hours to live?’ The teens’ responses were typically, ‘Be with friends and family.’ But the discussion came undone when Jason, our thirteen-year-old, said, ‘I’d get a second opinion.’” When it comes to opinions about death, only one counts: “Jesus said... ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’” (Jn 11:25-26 NIV). Rejoice, you won’t have to make the journey alone. Furthermore, whatever you give up for Christ in this life will be nothing to what you inherit in the next.

Tuesday August 24

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”

Ps 23:5 NKJV

Victory Over the Enemy

To protect his sheep the shepherd must constantly be on the lookout for a small, brown snake called the adder that can pop up out of its hole, bite the sheep and kill them. And that's what the Lord has done for us! He's dealt with Satan, the old serpent, and has prepared for us “a table in the presence of our enemies.” He's done for us what He did for Peter after his infamous chapter of denial: invited us back into fellowship with Him. Three days after Jesus rose from the dead, the angel said, “Go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee” (Mk 16:7 NKJV). The biggest failure was the only one Jesus singled out by name. When Peter reached the shore that morning beaten and weary, the fire was burning, the meal was prepared, and Jesus was saying, “Come and dine” (Jn 21:12). Have you failed badly? Jesus invites you to come, be fed, be healed and restored to fellowship with Him. But a word of caution: Peter didn't think he would fail, but he did. And so can you. St. Augustine said, “The Devil is like a mad dog that's chained up. He's powerless to harm us when we are outside his reach, but once we enter his circle we expose ourselves again to injury or harm.” You're no match for the enemy! But God has given you a strategy for dealing with him: “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (Jas 4:7 NIV).

Wednesday August 25

“You anoint my head with oil.” Ps 23:5 NKJV

Fresh Oil

The shepherd anoints his sheep with oil for two purposes: (a) To repel insects. If allowed to deposit their eggs into the soft membrane of a sheep's nose they can drive the sheep insane; the ewes stop giving milk and the lambs stop growing. So the shepherd anoints his sheep with an oil-like repellent that keeps the enemy at bay and the flock at peace. (b) To heal wounds. Most wounds result from living with the flock. So the shepherd regularly inspects his sheep because he doesn't want today's wound to become tomorrow's infection. Whether circumstances are driving you crazy, or you've just been wounded as a result of living with the flock:

First, go to the Shepherd. Before you go to anybody else, go to God because “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” (Ps 147:3 NIV). Second, bow before Him. In order to be anointed the sheep must lower their heads and let the shepherd apply the oil. Humble yourself, call on the Lord. “God will always give what is right to his people who cry to him...he will not be slow to answer them” (Lk 18:7 NCV). David writes, “I shall be anointed with fresh oil” (Ps 92:10). Yesterday's oil is quickly contaminated by the dirt and grime of the journey, so you must go to God daily and ask Him to empower you with His Spirit. A sheep doesn't understand how the oil works, but it doesn't have to. It's enough to know that something happens in the presence of its shepherd, that happens nowhere else.

Thursday August 26

“My cup runs over.” Ps 23:5 NKJV

He’s a God of Abundance

Paul writes, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph 3:20 NKJV). Our God is a God of abundance! In Scripture, the overflowing cup is a powerful symbol. As long as your cup was kept full you were welcome. But if it sat empty, the host was hinting that it was time to go. If he really enjoyed your company he kept filling it until it ran over the edge and down onto the table. Is your cup overflowing today? That means you’re welcome at God’s table, your seat is guaranteed, nobody can take your place, and your needs will be abundantly supplied. F. B. Meyer wrote: “Whatever the blessing in your cup, it’s sure to run over. With God the calf is always the fatted calf, the robe is always the best robe, the joy is unspeakable, the peace passeth understanding. God’s way is always characterized by overflowing bounty.” So the last thing on earth we need to worry about is “making ends meet.” Our cup overflows. Take grace, for example: “The more we see our sinfulness, the more we see God’s abounding grace forgiving us” (Ro 5:20 TLB). To abound is to have a surplus! The cup God gives overflows with mercy. Are you afraid it will run dry? That your warranty will expire? That your mistakes are too great? No way! Before Paul became a Christian he went around persecuting, imprisoning and killing Christians. Yet he wrote, “Grace...was poured out on me abundantly” (1Ti 1:14 NIV). Whatever you need today, God has—in abundance. So ask, and believe Him for it!

Friday August 27

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.” Ps 23:6 NKJV

It’s a Sure Thing

Let’s break this Scripture down: “Surely goodness and mercy.” People may disappoint you, but God’s goodness and mercy are sure things! “With [God] there is never the slightest variation or shadow of inconsistency” (Jas 1:17 PHPS). Our devotion to God may falter, but His devotion to us never does: “If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful” (2Ti 2:13 NLT). David didn’t say, “maybe, possibly, I hope so, or I’ve a hunch.” No, he said, “Surely” and that’s a promise you can stand on. “Shall follow me.” That sounds like another promise God made to His people: “All these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee” (Dt 28:2). Note the words: “follow...come on...overtake.” You can’t get away from them! God’s goodness and mercy followed Jonah to the bottom of the sea, Daniel into the lions’ den, and John into exile, opening heaven to him. Stop and look back: think of the scrapes God’s brought you through, the messes He’s helped clean up, the doors He’s opened, and what do you see? Blessings you don’t deserve, can’t escape, and are new every morning. With God—it’s a sure thing! “All the days of my life.” Think of the days ahead and what do you see? Days at home raising a family? Days in a dead-end job, struggling to get ahead? Days of loneliness and poor health? Days of caring for a sick loved one? Days of battling disappointment and depression? “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.” Goodness to provide, and mercy to pardon; you’ll never have a day without them!

Saturday August 28

“I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” Ps 23:6 NKJV

Heaven—Your Home

When we're young, heaven has limited appeal. We've too many dreams like love, marriage, children, career, etc. Aging is God's way of keeping us headed homeward. And what about death? Christians don't get buried, they get planted. Paul writes: “The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable...it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power” (1Co 15:42-43 NIV). Calvin Miller writes, “The world is poor because her treasure is buried in the sky and all her treasure maps are of the earth.” Have you heard the story of the bird named Putsy? When nobody claimed her the Humane Society gave her to Sue. They became fast friends. One day the little bird did something incredible; it perched on her shoulder and whispered, “Fifteen hundred South Oneida Street, Green Bay, Wisconsin.” Sue was dumbfounded. She discovered that the address actually existed, went there and found a man named John Stoobants. “Do you have a parakeet?” she asked. “I used to. I miss her terribly,” he replied. When he saw Putsy he was thrilled. “You know,” he said, “she even knows her phone number.” This story isn't as crazy as you might think. You see, we all have an eternal address within us. God has “set eternity in the hearts of men” (Ecc 3:11 NIV). Deep down, we know we're not home yet, so we must be careful not to live like we are. Would you set up house in a motel? The greatest calamity is not to feel far from home when you are, but to feel right at home when you're not. And we're not home yet, because “our homeland is in heaven” (Php 3:20 TLB).

Sunday August 29

“Seven times he said, ‘Go again.’” 1Ki 18:43 NKJV

“Get Up and Go Again”

Elijah the prophet told King Ahab that the drought in the land was over and the rains were coming. Then Elijah told his servant, “‘Go up now, look toward the sea.’ So he went up and looked, and said, ‘There is nothing.’ And seven times he said, ‘Go again.’ Then it came to pass the seventh time, that he said, ‘There is a cloud, as small as a man's hand, rising out of the sea!’ So he said, ‘Go up, say to Ahab, Prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you’...in the meantime...the sky became black...and there was a heavy rain” (vv. 43-45). Notice, seven times Elijah said, “Get up and go again.” You must persist! If you don't, you'll miss what God wants you to have. Furthermore, if you don't recognize and celebrate small miracles “the size of a man's hand,” you'll miss the bigger ones so essential to your future.

Beth Anne DeCiantis had to complete a twenty-six-mile marathon in less than two hours and forty-five minutes to qualify for the Olympics. She reached the final straightaway at 2:43, with just two minutes left. Two hundred yards from the finish she stumbled and fell. Dazed, she stayed down for twenty seconds. The crowd yelled, “Get up!” The clock was ticking—less than a minute to go. Beth Anne staggered to her feet and began walking. Five yards short of the finish, with ten seconds to go, she fell again. As the crowd cheered her on, she crossed the finish line on her hands and knees. Her time? Two hours, forty-four minutes, fifty-seven seconds. So the word for you today is “Get up and go again.”

Monday August 30

“Called according to His purpose.” Ro 8:28 NKJV

Know Your Life’s Vision

Nobody can give you a vision for your life, but here’s how to find yours: (1) Look within you. What moves you, what are you excited about? Paul said, “I am compelled to preach” (1Co 9:16 NIV). (2) Look behind you. What has life taught you? Experience provides us with the wisdom needed to fulfill our destiny. What does your past tell you about your future? (3) Look around you. God never calls us alone. Moses needed seventy elders. Jesus picked twelve disciples. Paul spoke of those who worked with him. Fulfilling your destiny requires having the right people in your life. (4) Look ahead of you. Helen Keller said, “The only thing that’s worse than being blind, is having sight but no vision.” What do you see through the eye of faith? St. Augustine said, “Faith is to believe what we do not see, and the reward of faith is to see what we believe.” (5) Look beside you. What resources are available to you, like books, CD’s, conferences and mentors? If your vision is not bigger than you, it’s not of God. And the greater it is, the more resources it will require. (6) Look above you. Jeremiah writes, “They speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the Lord” (Jer 23:16 NKJV). We are “called according to His purpose,” not according to the need, or the fact that the door is open, or that our talent will be appreciated and well rewarded. Your vision must fulfill your God-ordained destiny, nothing else. So, do you need to recognize your vision, or resurrect your vision, or refocus on your vision?

Tuesday August 31

“Keep your [life] free from the love of money.” Heb 13:5 NIV

It’s Only Money

A lot of us think that the goal of work is to accumulate enough money so that we can quit working. No, if your work is not fulfilling, eventually you’ll resent it. That’s so, whether you make much or little. Money alone is not worth giving your life to.

John Ortberg writes: “I have a friend. He’s a businessman. He is in his seventies now. Years ago I attended his church when he gave a terrific message. We talked afterwards and he said to me, ‘You know, when I was a young man I always felt that I ought to go into pastoral ministry.’ I asked him, ‘Why didn’t you?’ Well, when it came right down to it, it was just money. He was doing well in the business world so he didn’t follow what he sensed was God’s calling on his life. Now he was financially secure—but he was running out of time. It’s only money! We get all twisted up in knots over it, stay awake at night thinking about it, stew, get anxious, scheme, trade away our integrity to get a little more of it...and we worry that somebody else might get hold of it. It’s only money! It’s never a reason not to follow Christ. It’s never a reason not to do the thing that He has called you to do.”

Billy Graham hit the bull’s-eye when he said, “If a person gets his attitude toward money straight, it will help straighten out almost every other area of his life.” It’s okay to make money, and enjoy money, but “Keep your [life] free from the love of money.”