

# Today

Sept/Oct 2010

refresh, refocus, renew



**“Walking with God”**  
**Adrian A. Helleman**



**“Life Worthy of the Lord”**  
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re:FRAME MEDIA

# this month

## Walking with God

**Adrian A. Helleman**

**Toronto, Ontario**

For the month of September we will look at what it means to walk with God. And as we do that, we'll walk through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation.

Walking is a healthy form of exercise, both physically and spiritually. What's more, it is an honor and a privilege to walk with God. Believers walk with God, knowing that they belong to Jesus Christ, who has bought them and given them new life through his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. They show their thankfulness through their obedient walk with God throughout the rest of their lives.

We pray that these devotions may help you begin or strengthen your walk of faith through Christ, growing closer each day to the God who wants you to become all he has created you to be.

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## GOD WALKS IN THE GARDEN

*The man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day. —Genesis 3:8*

God enjoys walking. Did you know that? In Genesis we learn that God walked in the garden he had made, especially in the cool of the early evening.

Walking is my favorite form of exercise. My wife and I walk every morning in our neighborhood, weather permitting. We go out as soon as it is light. After I get home, I have my devotions. Then I also meditate on what God is doing in my life, and I commit the day to him.

God created human beings to have fellowship with him. That's why he was walking in the garden: he wanted to meet with Adam and Eve and spend time with them. Personal fellowship with God is at the very heart of our purpose for being!

This month we will look at Bible texts from Genesis to Revelation to reflect on what it means

to walk with God. And we'll discover that today God wants to have fellowship with us too.

To enjoy fellowship with God, we must pursue faithful obedience. Although he no longer walks in Eden since Adam and Eve sinned, God still meets us regularly through his Word and Spirit. By his Word, God speaks to us and gives us wisdom for the challenges of each day. And through his Spirit, we find new strength to stick close beside the Lord as we live according to his will.

*Lord, you have created us to have fellowship with you. We pray that you will meet us today. Help us this month to understand what it means to walk with you. In Jesus, Amen.*

## HIDING FROM GOD

*Adam and Eve] hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.*  
—Genesis 3:8

When I was a teenager, I accidentally damaged the family car. Nothing too serious—a broken taillight—but I was so ashamed that I tried to hide what I had done wrong.

We all try to do that sometimes, don't we?

From the beginning, God walked in the garden to have fellowship with Adam and Eve. Today's passage tells us they hid from God. What was going on? Why did they want to hide from the Lord? The answer is simple: as we learned from yesterday's reading, they had disobeyed God and were ashamed.

Sin is disobedience, and the result of sin is separation from God. Disobedience builds a wall between us and our Creator. Because of sin, we are afraid and hide ourselves from him. We inherited this tendency to dis-

obey God from our first parents. Because of their sin, we are unable to live the way God wants us to.

Yet God still wants to have fellowship with us and to walk with us each day! He wants that walk so deeply that he went to extraordinary lengths to restore what we had broken. In his Son, Jesus Christ, the Father will go the extra grace-filled mile to bring us back to his side.

How's it going in your walk with the Lord?

*God, our first parents disobeyed you, and so do we—again and again. Seek us out by your grace and bring us back into fellowship with you. Help us to obey you always. In Jesus, Amen.*

## NAKED BEFORE GOD

*[Adam] answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."*  
—Genesis 3:10

Have you ever had a dream about being undressed in a public place? I have. In my dream I wanted to hide myself, as Adam did when he discovered he was naked before God. But Adam's shame was not merely physical—it was deeply spiritual.

Adam realized that by his sin he had broken the bond with God that was sustained in his daily walk with him. This time, when God walked in the garden, Adam was afraid and hid from God. He knew that God's penetrating gaze would see through to his guilt and failure.

When God confronted Adam with his sin, he refused to accept responsibility and tried to excuse himself by blaming Eve. In fact, Adam also tried to pass the blame along to God by saying, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree." Then Eve,

in turn, blamed the serpent. Once fellowship is broken by sin, the "blame game" begins.

We do the same, don't we? We blame others for our own failures. Children learn that early in life: "I didn't do it. Jimmy did."

We do not like others to see us as we really are.

But escape from our shame is possible only when we come out of the shadows and stand in the light of God's forgiving love and grace.

*Lord, I am ashamed to reveal myself to you. Yet you know me as I really am. You know my sinfulness. Forgive me and help me to enjoy fellowship with you and my neighbor. Amen.*

## ENOCH WALKED WITH GOD

*Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.*  
—Genesis 5:24

We know very little about Enoch. His father was Jared, and his son was Methuselah, who lived longer than anyone else. The most surprising thing about Enoch is that he did not die. “By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: ‘He could not be found, because God had taken him away.’ For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.”

Enoch was one of two people in the Bible who never experienced death. The other was Elijah. (See 2 Kings 2:1-14.)

Enoch’s walk with God made him stand out from the crowd. Only a few generations later, God would send a flood to wipe away a humanity that no longer understood what it meant to live close with God. Only Enoch’s great-grandson Noah and his family would be

spared so that human beings could make a new beginning.

God’s special gift to Enoch reminds us that walking with God is the way to true life. Of course, unless the Lord returns in our lifetime, we will all face death. But Jesus, who identifies himself as the way to God (John 14:6), also said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die” (John 11:25). Walking with God in faith puts us on a road that takes us beyond death to life eternal.

*We thank you, God, for people like Enoch, who did not have to die because he walked with you. Fill us with your Holy Spirit so that we too may walk faithfully with you. In Jesus, Amen.*

## NOAH WALKED WITH GOD

*Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God.* —Genesis 6:9

Imagine being Noah and hearing God's command to build an ark! Noah was nearly 600 years old at that time. He had "walked faithfully with God," and he wasn't about to stop. But what a strange demand from God! The ark would be massive. The task was huge. But Noah obeyed God and got to work!

In Noah's day, all the people on earth were so corrupt that no one else was willing to join Noah in his walk of obedience. They probably laughed at him, saying something like "Hey, old man, why are you building a boat so far from water?" But Noah persevered and built the ark that God used to save him, his family, and all the animals it held.

Walking with God may mean doing things that look foolish, but a true walk with God

means having fellowship with God and praying seriously, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening!" (1 Samuel 3:9). It means acting on divine wisdom that will seem like foolishness in the mind of a godless world (see 1 Corinthians 1:18-31).

Was Noah perfect? Hardly. Noah stumbled later in his walk when he became drunk and subjected himself to ridicule (Gen. 9:20-23). But we don't need to be perfect to be used by God in remarkable ways. God used Noah to make a new start with the human race. What will he do with you?

*Lord, I know I'm not perfect, but help me do what you want me to do. Help me to be obedient, even if others laugh at me. Your will be done. Amen.*

## ABRAHAM TOLD TO WALK WITH GOD

*The LORD appeared to [Abraham] and said, “. . . Walk before me faithfully and be blameless.”*  
—Genesis 17:1

Abraham was ninety-nine years old when God promised to make him the father of many nations. And even though Abraham and his wife, Sarah, had not had any children together, God promised that they would have a son. Sarah would be ninety years old when Isaac, the child of the covenant, would be born (Genesis 17:17-19). Nothing is impossible with God!

At the heart of God's relationship with Abraham was his covenant. Whenever God makes a covenant, he promises something and calls for something in return. God promised Abraham an amazing future, and God called Abraham to serve him faithfully. As a sign that he and his family belonged to God, Abraham was also to circumcise all the males in his whole household.

Abraham had an amazing faith walk. He literally packed his

bags, left his family home, and moved to the place where God led him (Genesis 12). Hebrews repeats the promise that Abraham and Sarah, in spite of their advanced age, would have descendants “as countless as the sand on the seashore.”

In an amazing way, God fulfilled that promise in Christ Jesus. Though most of us cannot claim a genealogy that reaches back to Abraham, we can be grafted into his family tree by faith in Abraham's greatest Son, Jesus. As Paul declares in Galatians 3:7, “Those who have faith [in Christ] are children of Abraham.”

*Lord, increase our faith so that we can serve you. Help us through your Spirit to walk with you in faith, trusting in your promises to us. Amen.*

## ABRAHAM PROVES HIS WALK WITH GOD

*"Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."*  
—Genesis 22:12

God tested Abraham in a most difficult way. God had blessed Abraham with a son, and now God put him to the ultimate test, asking him to sacrifice that one and only son, Isaac. Abraham had walked faithfully with God, and now that walk of faith kept going. Hearing God's command, Abraham dutifully loaded a donkey and took Isaac with him into the wilderness.

Would you have done that? No parent wants to lose a child, much less cause their child's own death!

When Isaac asked his father about the lamb for the sacrifice, Abraham replied in the language of faith: "God himself will provide . . ." Still, Abraham must have had a moment of doubt when he bound Isaac, laid him on top of the wood, and lifted the knife to kill him. Only then did God intervene, sending an

angel to stop Abraham and providing a ram for the sacrifice. Because of Abraham's obedience, God blessed him and promised that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through his offspring.

Indeed, all nations have been blessed through Abraham's greatest descendent, Jesus Christ. God so loved the world that he sacrificed his one and only Son (John 3:16). God the Father did what Abraham did not have to do. God himself provided the sacrificial lamb. Jesus is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

*Father, you tested Abraham, asking him to sacrifice his son, and yet you sacrificed your own Son. We want to thank you by walking faithfully with you. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## ABRAHAM FINDS A WIFE FOR ISAAC

*"The LORD, before whom I have walked faithfully, will . . . make your journey a success."*  
—Genesis 24:40

Abraham's servant quoted Abraham's words in Laban's house, where he had gone to get a wife for Isaac. Abraham's walk with God included trust that God would provide a wife for his son from among his relatives. And God did—he provided Rebekah, the sister of Laban. She was the granddaughter of Nahor, Abraham's brother.

Abraham's conviction that Isaac should not marry a Canaanite woman had deep spiritual roots. The Canaanite worship of fertility gods was steeped in immoral practices. If Isaac married a local Canaanite, he would be strongly tempted to break away from a covenantal walk with the Lord. The future of God's redemptive plan was on the line. After all, Isaac was the promised son through whom God would make Abraham the father of many nations.

The quality of our relationships matters in our faith walk. In most countries today, parents no longer select spouses for their children, but all parents, if they are believers, want their children to walk faithfully with God in a marriage where both partners honor Christ. There are wonderful stories of believers who have led an unbelieving spouse to Christ. But faith is tested in homes where the blessing of a common commitment to Christ is lacking. A close walk with the Lord is nurtured when marriage partners walk with Christ together.

*Help us, Father, to serve you faithfully and, if we have children, help them to do so as well. We admit we are easily led astray. Strengthen our faith, we pray. Amen.*

## THE BLESSING OF JACOB

*"May the God before whom . . . Abraham and Isaac walked faithfully . . . —may he bless these boys." —Genesis 48:15-16*

As Jacob's life drew to a close, he blessed his children and grandchildren. While blessing the sons of Joseph, Jacob called on the Lord, before whom his father and grandfather had "walked faithfully." Jacob's prayer was that now a faithful walk with God would follow in the generations to come.

Notice that Jacob described the Lord as "the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day." What a beautiful declaration of God's guidance and care! In this way Jacob gave God all the credit for the "walk" he experienced during his life—and that's the way it should be. Without God's shepherding care, Jacob would have been a hopelessly lost sheep headed for certain destruction. That's true for the rest of us too.

Even Jacob's blessing on his descendants was guided by God.

Through the Lord's guidance, Jacob had grown to understand how important God's covenant promises were, and he wanted to pass along reminders of those promises to his descendants so that they too would know they should walk in God's ways.

Walking with God encourages the next generation to do the same. And in covenant faithfulness God honors the faith of our spiritual fathers and mothers in their walk through life, guided always by the Lord, our good Shepherd. (See also Psalm 23; John 10:11-16.)

*Bless all who walk with you, Lord. May we walk before you faithfully, knowing we need your shepherding care each day. In Jesus, Amen.*

## GOD WALKS WITH HIS PEOPLE

*"I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people."*  
—Leviticus 26:12

Leviticus is not an easy book to read. It is full of rules that apply to the Israelites in the Old Testament. God set up those rules to make for himself a new people that would bless all other peoples, through a Savior.

God had brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, but they had not yet entered the promised land. God promised to bless them, and they were responsible to keep his commands. God promised to make their life fruitful, to live among them, and to walk with them; he would be their God, and they would be his people. But if they walked away from God and rejected his commands, he would punish them.

Throughout Israel's long history the people often wandered from God, and the Lord had to keep shepherding them back onto safe pathways. Sometimes he had to

punish them for their wickedness and rebellion, but he always maintained a remnant of faithful followers. And eventually from those people God provided the Savior, Jesus. He fulfilled the Old Testament law for the sake of God's people and then paid the price for the punishment of sin.

God promises to bless us today as well, and he calls us to be faithful. God walks with us too; he is our God, and we are his people. And today, through Jesus Christ, we have the Holy Spirit to help us walk faithfully with God. Let's thank God today for Jesus and the Spirit, who help us to live by the Word of the Lord.

*Father, thank you for walking with us and providing the way for us to live. Through Jesus and your Spirit, help us walk faithfully with you. Amen.*

## WALKING WITH GOD AND HIS BLESSING

*Walk in obedience to all that the LORD . . . has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper . . . —Deuteronomy 5:33*

After Moses instructed God's people in the Ten Commandments, he added that they must walk obediently in God's way. Then, he said, God would bless them richly and make them prosper in the promised land.

To interpret this promise wisely, we need to know that prosperity in the Bible has more to do with spiritual blessings than material or physical things. All over the world there are people who interpret God's blessing mainly as a promise to make them healthy and wealthy. But that is a mistake. While some people do experience blessings of "never having spent a day in the hospital" or "never worrying about how to pay the bills," the prosperity gospel, as it is sometimes called, twists the message of Scripture.

Frankly, walking with God can be costly. Many have lost their jobs and their fortunes because

of their commitment to Christ. Others have been persecuted and had their health broken because of torture for the name of Christ. Yet, amazingly, these same Christians will declare that in the midst of deep sacrifice they were blessed.

When we walk with God, we live in community with our Lord. We feel God's delight in all things good, and we sense his pain in the face of sin and evil. Such a close walk with God is itself a blessing. The joy and peace that flow from our relationship with God far outweigh the cost of being a follower of Jesus Christ.

*Lord, help us to walk in your way. May we experience the blessings of true joy and peace that come from living in relationship with you. Amen.*

## A MATTER OF THE HEART

*These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. —Deuteronomy 6:6-7*

Sometimes we're in a situation where we have to socialize with people we don't like very much. Good manners demand that we pretend to enjoy other people's company. So we smile politely, listen to conversations, try to get along, and make it through the event. But we're glad when it's over and we can go do something else.

How about in our walk with God? Do we truly delight in being in God's presence?

Moses shows that obedience to God isn't something we can just pretend for a while. God's commands penetrate to the core of our being—they are to be "on our hearts." Obedience calls for a total commitment to our Lord. That's why Moses teaches, "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."

Moses explains further that parents must constantly teach God's commands to their children: "Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."

Walking is good exercise for the heart. That is one reason my wife and I walk every morning. But walking with God is a matter of the heart in a different sense: it's a round-the-clock commitment. Anything less will not do. God does not want us to obey him some of the time in a half-hearted way. He wants all of us all the time!

*Lord, help me to walk wholeheartedly with you. May I do so with my whole being, every moment of every day. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## WALKING IN OBEDIENCE

*I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him . . . .*  
—Deuteronomy 30:16

In one of his final addresses to the Israelites, Moses urged the people to remain faithful to God in the land they were entering. He reaffirmed the blessings and curses that God had established in his covenant. God would bless them as long as they walked in his ways and kept his commands. But if they did not, God would bring punishment on them.

Today, God's new covenant with us is established through the good news of Jesus Christ. Keeping covenant means embracing the transforming grace of Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit by whom we serve God faithfully. Rejecting the covenant means rejecting God's claim on our lives. The path through Jesus leads to eternal life; the path of rejection leads to death—not just physical

death, which happens to all, but complete separation from God.

The starkness of this choice makes many people today feel uncomfortable. They want a kind, loving God, who only blesses them and never punishes anyone. But that's not the God we meet in the Bible. The message of Scripture is that, through Jesus, God has provided the salvation we need in order to have eternal life. So there is no personal issue greater than a walk of faith and obedience with our Lord. If you aren't on that road, pray for the Spirit's power to bring you close to the Savior's side.

*Lord, help me to walk in your way every day so that I may experience your love. Help me day by day to choose the road that leads to eternal life. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## SOLOMON WALKED WITH GOD

*If you walk in obedience to me and keep my . . . commands . . .  
I will give you a long life.* —1 Kings 3:14

Solomon became a great king—through God’s amazing blessings to him.

We read that Solomon showed his love for God by walking according to the instructions of his father David, “except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.”

There was especially one way in which Solomon affirmed his walk with God, and that was in his request for wisdom. One night, after Solomon had offered a thousand sacrifices to the Lord, God came to him in a dream and said, “Ask for whatever you want.” Solomon answered well by asking for wisdom to govern God’s people.

God was pleased by this request, so he gave Solomon remarkable wisdom. God also promised Solomon great wealth and honor, saying that he would have

“no equal among kings.” And it wasn’t long before God fulfilled those promises. (See 1 Kings 3-10, and especially 10:23-24.)

What gift do you especially ask from God? Many people today ask for riches and honor. Perhaps the request of Solomon should have a greater impact on us. God does not demand that we be perfect as we walk with him. But he wants us to try to walk faithfully, depending on his Spirit to guide us. Pray daily for God’s wisdom in your life. And whatever gift God gives you, use it in his service.

*Lord, I know I am not perfect, but I do want to walk with you faithfully. Fill me with your Spirit, and help me to use my gifts in your service. Amen.*

## KINGS WHO WALK WITH GOD

*"If only your descendants are careful in all they do to walk before me . . . ."*  
—2 Chronicles 6:16

In his prayer at the dedication of the temple, Solomon remembered the promise that God had made to his father David: that the descendants of David would occupy the throne of Israel if they were careful to walk faithfully with God. Solomon recalled this promise as he prayed on behalf of the people.

The amazing thing about God's promise to David is that God pledged never to turn away from David's descendants. If David's line did wrong, God would send punishment but would never withdraw his love. "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16). What an astonishing promise of grace!

Of course, not all of David's descendents walked faithfully with God. Eventually even the

physical throne in Jerusalem was torn away. But David's line continued through a remnant. (See 2 Chronicles 36:19-20.) Even when people are faithless, God is faithful.

God's promise of a king from David's line was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who is both the Son of David and the Son of God. Jesus walked with God and obeyed him perfectly every day of his life. His faithful walk makes possible not only our forgiveness but also our own walk of faith with God.

*Jesus, you are the King of kings. Help me to walk faithfully with you and to serve in the hope of your coming kingdom. In your name, Amen.*

## HEZEKIAH WALKED WITH GOD

*“Remember, LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion . . . .”*

—2 Kings 20:3

Hezekiah “did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his [ancestor] David had done” (2 Kings 18:3). Hezekiah’s father, Ahaz, had been a king who did evil in God’s sight. Hezekiah tore down the altars and sacred stones his father had used to worship other gods, and the Lord blessed Hezekiah by giving him victories over enemy oppressors who tried to ruin God’s people.

But then Hezekiah became ill, and the Lord said that he would soon die. So Hezekiah pleaded with God for healing, reminding the Lord in prayer that he had walked before him “faithfully and with wholehearted devotion.” And he wept bitterly.

God answered Hezekiah’s prayer by adding fifteen years to his life. Hezekiah was thankful, but he did not always use his extra time wisely. He had a

weakness in that he was proud of all the treasures of his kingdom. And when visitors came from Babylon, he proudly showed them all his treasures. Later the prophet Isaiah said that one day those treasures would be carried off to Babylon. God’s cure of Hezekiah’s illness did not cure him of his pride.

A mountain-top spiritual experience doesn’t protect us against a fall into the valley of sin. If you have been to the mountaintop, pray for sustaining grace. And if you have fallen, know that God’s forgiving grace is great.

*Lord, you know me better than I know myself. Lift me up with your grace and keep me from falling into sin, I pray. Help me walk faithfully with you. Amen.*

## JOB: BLAMELESS AND UPRIGHT

*Job . . . was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.*  
—Job 1:1

In the little drama that opens the book of Job, God tells Satan: “There is no one on earth like him.” For Job “was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.” Job is also described as “the greatest man among all the people of the East.” He was wealthy, and God had blessed him with seven sons and three daughters.

Job worshiped God faithfully. Every day he sacrificed a burnt offering for each of his children, in case they had sinned against God.

But the devil claimed that Job only served God for what he could get out of it. In other words, Job’s faith lacked integrity; Job only walked with God because it made him prosper.

So God allowed Satan to test Job’s faith. God allowed Satan to take away Job’s children and

wealth. And although Job’s faith became strained, it did not break. Job never cursed God. He remained faithful, even confessing, “The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.”

Maybe you are going through a “Job moment” in your life. Life is tough right now. Your walk with God isn’t making you rich, keeping you from sickness, or protecting your children from troubles. Will you, with Job, show the integrity of your faith by continuing to walk with God? In spite of your present struggles, God will not leave your side.

*Lord, help us to trust in you even when we and those around us are sick or have lost our livelihood. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

## DELIGHTING IN GOD

*Blessed are those who do not walk in step with the wicked . . .*

—Psalm 1:1

One reason I enjoy reading from the book of Psalms is that it offers guidance in our walk with God. Psalm 1 reminds us that ultimately life offers only two roads to travel. “Blessed are those who do not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but who delight in the law of the LORD, and meditate on his law day and night.”

This psalm describes a progression in the way we can get dragged into a lifestyle that dishonors God. It begins with “walking,” moves to “standing,” and ends in “sitting.” The psalmist describes a life that begins with a flirtatious walk with sin and ends up deeply mired in mockery of the Lord and his way.

A life of wickedness has no real weight to it. It cannot last; it is

“like chaff that the wind blows away.”

By contrast, a righteous life has balance and stability. That’s what faith and obedience give to God’s children. In this regard we can say that a person who walks with God is like “a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.”

Does your life have stability through your walk with God? Does it have the strength, in Christ, to stand strong in the stormy times of life? (See Philippians 4:13.) Walking the path with your Lord means life today and forever.

*Lord, help me to walk the path that leads to full life with you. Keep me from temptation. May your Word be the delight and strength of my heart. Amen.*

## DWELLING IN GOD'S SANCTUARY

*Who may dwell in your sanctuary? . . . Those whose walk is blameless, who do what is righteous . . .* —Psalm 15:1-2

What is God's sanctuary? Probably too many of us think of it only as a church building. In its widest, richest sense, God's sanctuary is wherever we experience God. It is the place where our heart is. On Sunday a church building becomes a sanctuary as God's people gather and make up the building blocks of God's spiritual temple (2 Corinthians 6:16; 1 Peter 2:5). There we are strengthened for another week of work, another week of serving God—out in the sanctuary of God's vast world.

Psalm 15 reminds us that what pleases God is not rituals but a life that seeks to live God's way. When we walk with God on a daily basis, we will do what is right, speak the truth, refuse to slander others, and not harm our neighbors in any way. What's more, we won't be impressed by people who delight

in doing wrong or in mocking God, and we will honor those who faithfully serve God. We will keep our promises, even when it hurts. And we will help the poor and protect the innocent, taking no part in bribery, fraud, or other corruption.

When we live as the psalmist describes, we experience God's presence. This happens not only in church gatherings but also in our everyday activities. Those who live God's way are building a life that cannot be shaken—regardless of the way uninvited trials can try to shift the ground under our feet!

*Lord, help us to enter your sanctuary and experience your presence by living as you want us to—not only on Sundays but every day of our lives. Amen.*

## WALKING ACCORDING TO GOD'S LAW

*Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD.*  
—Psalm 119:1

This psalm is a long meditation on the importance of following God's law, living God's way. Those who live God's way are "blessed." They recognize all the goodness and blessing that have come into their lives through the love and grace of God (see John 3:16; Philippians 4:4-13). And God's law is their guide for grateful living.

Some people I know do not like to obey the law—and certainly not God's law. They make their own rules. The psalmist, however, praises God's law as true and beautiful. Whether we are young or old, we do well to walk with God, the only source of blessing and goodness in life (James 1:17).

Whenever we disobey God's law by giving in to temptation, we may feel a thrill or a sense of freedom or fun or ecstasy, but it won't last, and sooner or later

we experience disappointment and grief for doing wrong. Then we realize that the psalmist is right: only by following God's way for our lives will we have full, joyful life (see John 10:10).

I know this from personal experience. I have done things that were wrong, and later I had no joy. You probably have had this experience too. It's the Holy Spirit of God who convicts us of sin (John 16:8). The Spirit stirs our hearts to remember God's law, and we realize we have done wrong. But the Spirit then also encourages and guides us to live by the truth of God (John 16:13). We can depend on him!

*Dear God, fill me with your Spirit to help me walk according to your way and enjoy truly joyful, full life. In Jesus, Amen.*

## BLAMELESS WALKING

*Better the poor whose walk is blameless than the rich whose ways are perverse.*  
—Proverbs 28:6

Have you ever wanted to be rich? All of us, no doubt, have dreamed of what we might do with a million dollars. And the Bible tells us about many faithful believers in God who were wealthy—such as Abraham (Genesis 12:4-5; 14:14; 17:23).

Money is not a problem, but the love of money is a sure way to destruction (see Matthew 6:24; 1 Timothy 6:10). Our text today adds that if the way to wealth means selling out the integrity of our walk with God, it's not worth it. Better to be poor and walk blamelessly with God than to be rich but wicked.

But isn't wealth the way to security? In this same chapter, the author of Proverbs writes, "Those whose walk is blameless are kept safe, but those whose ways are perverse will fall into the pit." God protects all who

walk with him, but he will punish the corrupt.

Do any of us really think that nothing matters more in life than our net worth? (See Jesus' parable in Luke 12:13-21.) Our security isn't found in our wealth, but in the one, true God. As we read later in this chapter from Proverbs: "Those who trust in themselves are fools, but those who walk in wisdom are kept safe." Walking in wisdom with your Lord is better even than riches.

*Lord, help me to walk blamelessly with you. Keep me from the temptation to love money. Give me the wisdom to see it as a gift and a resource to serve you, to bring you honor and glory. In Jesus, Amen.*

## THE JOY OF A HOLY WALK

*A highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness; it will be for those who walk on that Way.* —Isaiah 35:8

Sometimes when we walk with God, we might wonder if we are really getting anywhere. It may seem that others, by cutting ethical corners, are making names for themselves and really getting ahead. It may seem that our walk with God has kept us on a treadmill to nowhere. If so, take heart from this chapter from Isaiah.

Isaiah paints a beautiful picture of our future. A kingdom is coming—and it is God’s kingdom, in which all evil will be destroyed and all will be at peace. Those who faithfully obey God’s commands will enjoy full life in this wonderful place. God is making a highway we can follow in order to get there. While traveling on it, God will protect us from danger. God personally cares for everyone on this road by becoming a fellow traveler and walking with us.

Only those who believe in Jesus Christ may journey on this road, for it is “the Way of Holiness.” Real holiness is possible only through Jesus. He is the Way (John 14:6). Only those who walk faithfully with him will be permitted to enter God’s new heaven and new earth. And God’s Spirit gives them the strength to walk faithfully. They will enter with singing and with everlasting joy. And sorrow will give way to joy and gladness.

Come! Believe in Jesus, and join the throng that is traveling to the kingdom of God!

*Lord Jesus, I want to join that throng. Please wash away my sins and help me to come into your holy presence. Help me to walk with you every day. Amen.*

## IDOLS OF OUR TIME

*Walk in obedience to all I command you, that it may go well with you.*  
—Jeremiah 7:23

We know there is a bright future in store for those who walk faithfully with God. But in our verses for today from the prophet Jeremiah, God warns that he is angry when people do not obey his commands.

God goes so far as to tell Jeremiah not to pray for the people of his nation who have rejected God and have turned to idols. God reminds Jeremiah of the covenant he made with his people: “Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people.”

We need to hear these words. We are often tempted to turn to our own idols as well. Maybe they are not made of wood, stone, or metal, but they are idols nevertheless. Some people worship power; others, sex; and so many worship money—or even all three at the same time.

We can make idols out of material things, status, wealth, pleasure-seeking, leisure, work, school, sports, hobbies, friends, our church, our own abilities—anything that we might put ahead of God in our lives. We need to ask ourselves, What do we love with all our heart? What grabs our attention? What do we most enjoy?

The future for all who walk with God is very bright. But a future without God is bleak.

In God’s strength, we can seek first his kingdom and his righteousness (Matthew 6:33), and the walkway of our life with God will lead to “a delightful inheritance” (Psalm 16:6).

*Lord, help us not to worship the idols of our time, which are so numerous and tempting. Help us to love you with all our heart, and to enjoy you forever. Amen.*

## THE FUTURE OF GOD'S PEOPLE

*We will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever.*

—Micah 4:5

Micah describes the coming kingdom of God as a time of peace and blessing. In one sense, God's kingdom is already here, but in another sense, the full glory of the kingdom still needs to be revealed. We don't know when that will be; only the Father knows (Mark 13:32). In the meantime people of all nations will flock to the Lord to learn his ways so that they too can walk in his paths.

God will eventually judge all the nations and settle every dispute. And people who were at war "will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks." God's people will be able to enjoy the pleasant shade of their vines and fruit trees.

What a wonderful future! I am looking forward to that day, as I'm sure you are too.

Already today we can begin to enjoy this divine kingdom of *shalom* (peace and flourishing for all). Already we can experience fellowship with the King and all who are fellow citizens of his kingdom (Ephesians 2:19). Already today God invites us to change our behavior so that we can better experience his peace and reconciliation.

Our thoughts and actions are to be shaped by God's coming kingdom! Walking with God, we can begin to enjoy the future today.

*Lord, we pray that your kingdom will come soon, so that all your people may enjoy full life in your presence. But help us now to walk faithfully with you, and give us a further glimpse of that day. In Jesus, Amen.*

## WHAT SACRIFICE DOES GOD WANT?

*What does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.* —Micah 6:8

The Old Testament book of Leviticus is filled with details about animal sacrifices for the sins of the people. But, as Micah observes, such sacrifices are not enough. The sacrifice of “thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil” will not please God. Micah sees such rituals as meaningless if people’s hearts are not in tune with God. Then Micah spells out how to show sincere obedience: act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

Jesus Christ demonstrated perfect obedience to God. He came to do God’s will. He knew that God was not ultimately pleased with ritual offerings. Instead he offered his own life so that through his sacrifice we might be made holy once for all (see Hebrews 10:8-10). Christ did what Micah instructed: he acted justly, loved mercy,

and walked humbly with God. As those who are made holy through Christ’s sacrifice, we must pursue Christlikeness in our walk with God.

In our efforts to please God, we must examine these areas of our lives regularly. Do we act with justice in how we deal with people? Do we show mercy to those who have wronged us in some way? Are we learning to be more humble? God wants us to offer ourselves wholeheartedly, living for him with every part of our being.

*Jesus, you offered yourself for my sake. Help me to offer myself to live for you. May I act with justice, mercy, and humility, as you did. In your name, Amen.*

## FOLLOWING THE LIGHT

*"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* —John 8:12

Are you afraid of the dark? Many people are. My grandchildren need a night light. Otherwise they cannot sleep.

Physical darkness is one thing, but there is also spiritual darkness. How can people who want to walk with God find their way in a dark world?

Jesus provides the answer. "Follow me!" he said to each of his disciples. "Follow me!" is what he says to every believer. Amid the shadows of moral confusion and the gray gloom of guilt, Jesus is the light of the world! When we follow him, we will never walk in darkness.

While living in tropical countries, I learned that when the sun sets, it becomes dark very quickly. Sometimes there is no power, and then you are totally in the dark unless you have a flashlight, candle, or some other

source of light. I was always glad that I had a light of some kind.

For us as believers, Jesus is our source of light. We do not have to be afraid of the dark. We will never have to experience darkness, because we "have the light of life." John writes about Jesus in John 1:4-5: "In him was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." The darkness of evil will never overcome the light of Jesus. Hallelujah!

*"Shine, Jesus, shine" into the darkest corners of the world and expose every evil thing. Help me to follow you, the light of the world. Brighten my path as I walk with you. Amen.*

## WALKING IN THE LIGHT

*“Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you.”*

—John 12:35

Do you enjoy sunsets? I do. In the Philippines we would sometimes go to the shore and watch the setting sun. We would enjoy the last rays of sunlight for a few minutes, and then darkness would come.

We know that Jesus called himself the light of the world. But Jesus also warned the people around him that they had to walk in his light, because soon darkness would come. Jesus was predicting his death on the cross, which would happen in just a few days. They would not have his light much longer.

And “those who walk in the dark,” he said, “do not know where they are going.” Once when I was walking along a beach in the Philippines, it quickly grew dark. There was no moonlight, and I stumbled along till I finally got home.

Jesus advised his listeners to put their trust in the light—that is, in him—while he was still with them. Do we trust in him?

In our personal lives, there are times when the sun shines brightly. We need to use those times to prepare ourselves for periods when darkness falls and we walk in shadows of trial and suffering. Don’t neglect to walk with the Lord while you’re enjoying good times. And take heart from Jesus, who says, “I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.” If we walk faithfully with God, we too can enjoy Jesus’ light—not only now but forever.

*Amid the gloom of the world around us, Father, it is good to know that your Son came to be our light. Help us to walk in his light each day. Amen.*

## A HOLY WALK

*"I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."* —2 Corinthians 6:16

Paul knew the Scriptures well, and in his writings he often quoted from them. One of the quotations in our reading for today is from Leviticus 26, and it is also found in Jeremiah 32 and Ezekiel 37. Paul uses this quotation in the context of showing what it means for us to be temples of the living God.

A temple of God is a remarkable place—it's where God lives. By Christ's Spirit, we as Christians are the places where God lives today in this world.

Moreover, a temple is a holy place. We often think of holiness as another way to speak of moral purity.

But from the Old Testament we learn that even the pots and pans in the temple were to be holy (Zechariah 14:20-21). That's because the basic meaning of *holy* is "set apart." You

and I, as holy people, are "set apart for God." What does that mean for the way you live your life today?

Are there things in your life that keep you from being holy? If there are, it's time to do some housecleaning.

Get rid of anything in your life that can corrupt you or distract you from living as a temple of the Holy Spirit. Let the light of Jesus shine into the dark crannies of your life and expose whatever is there. Then ask God's Spirit to do a thorough cleansing!

*Holy God, cleanse me of every impurity, whether in thought, word, or deed. I want to have fellowship with you. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## BENEFITS OF WALKING IN THE LIGHT

*If we walk in the light . . . we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus . . . purifies us from all sin. —1 John 1:7*

When I go walking in the morning, there are important benefits: it is good for my heart and bones. Similarly there are important benefits of walking with God. John lists two: “we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus . . . purifies us from all sin.” The great commandment is to love God and our neighbor. These are the two dimensions of our relationships: a vertical relationship with God and a horizontal relationship with each other.

When we walk in the darkness, both relationships are affected: we no longer have a healthy relationship with God or with those around us. Our relationship with God is broken in a way like Adam and Eve’s fellowship with God became ruined when they sinned. The consequences of that are still present today. And our rela-

tionship with others is broken in a way like Adam and Eve’s fellowship broke down. The consequences of that damage remain in our relationships with family, friends, and neighbors. A broken relationship with God affects all our other relationships.

But when we walk in the light, the grace that heals our relationship with God also brings healing to our other relationships. Having been forgiven, we learn to practice forgiveness—even with those we consider our enemies. Grace restores and renews us completely!

*God, we thank you for forgiving and purifying us. Heal and strengthen our relationship with you and with everyone around us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

## END OF THE STORY

*The glory of God gives [the city] light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light . . . —Revelation 21:23-24*

This month we have walked through the Bible while examining many passages about walking with God. I hope you have enjoyed this walk as much as I have. And I pray that it has strengthened your walk with God.

Revelation brings us to the end of the story. It pictures the new Jerusalem coming from heaven, where God dwells. This city is pictured as needing no sun or moon, since God provides its light. Thus there is no night. Every nation on earth will live by God's light, and their rulers will bring into that city all the wonderful things that we as human beings have accomplished. God values what we have done, and he will use our treasures to bring honor and glory to himself.

Best of all, the darkness of sin will be absent, because nothing impure will be allowed to enter the city, and only those whose

names are in the book of life may come in.

The people who enter that city are already citizens of God's kingdom (Ephesians 2:19). They trust that their guilt is washed away through Christ's sacrifice. And they strive to walk in thankfulness with their Lord every day. They look forward to a wonderful future in which God walks with us forever.

Are you ready for that wonderful future with God?

*Lord, we thank you for the Bible and the promise of the new Jerusalem. Remove whatever is sinful in us so that we can enter that city. May we always walk with you! Amen.*

# this month

## Life Worthy of the Lord

**Harvey Stob**

**Ann Arbor, Michigan**

What do you want to be known for? What would you like people to say about you?

In his letter to the Colossian church, Paul notes that he pleads with God to fill us “with the knowledge of his will.” Why? So that we may “live a life worthy of the Lord” (Colossians 1:9-10).

Could anything better be said about you than that you live in a way that is worthy of Jesus? What might such a life look like?

Let’s look into the Scriptures together this month and discover the life that Jesus would find worthy of him!

*Rev. Harvey Stob and his wife, Audrey, served as missionaries in Argentina for eleven years. They then served churches in Cincinnati, Ohio; Ridgewood, New Jersey; and Ann Arbor, Michigan. Harvey retired from full-time pastoral work in 2009. He and Audrey have three children and seven grandchildren.*

## LIVING A LIFE WORTHY OF THE LORD

*We have not stopped praying for you . . . so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord. . . .*  
—Colossians 1:9-10

What would you like people to say about you? That you're smart? That you're good looking? That you're important?

Paul prays that God will fill us with the knowledge of his will. Why? So that we may "live a life worthy of the Lord."

Can you imagine someone saying about you, "I know \_\_\_\_; she lives a life worthy of the Lord!" or, ". . . he lives just like the Lord lived!" Can you imagine anything greater that could ever be said about you?

What will our lives look like if we live in a manner "worthy of the Lord"? For starters, imagine Jesus watching us and saying things like these:

- "There's a young boy being kind to an injured classmate. I would have done that myself!"

- "There's a business leader who just made a decision based on what is best for the employees. I like that!"
- "There's a woman who faces one crisis after another but continues to trust in God with all her heart. That's worthy of me; I had to do that too!"

The Bible will help us see more of what that life will look like, but we must want to live it if the Bible is to be of any help.

So, first of all, do I *want* to live a life worthy of the Lord? Do you? Will the Lord see reflections of his life in the way we live?

*What a meaningful, gracious, loving life you lived, Jesus! I too want to live my life as you lived yours. Would you help me do that? Amen.*

## DO I PLEASE GOD?

*We have not stopped praying for you . . . so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord. . . .*  
—Colossians 1:9-10

We were made to please. It's not uncommon to walk into a room of five-year-olds and hear at least one of them say, "See what I can do?" as the child hops or does a somersault. Or another may bring us a drawing and say, "See what I made?" We try to please our boss; we like to please our spouse. The desire to please was created in us.

Though we were first made good (Genesis 1-2), we fell into sin (Genesis 3). Then later we read the devastating news that God's "heart was deeply troubled" because he saw how great our wickedness had become. Our thoughts, words, and actions were so sinful that God regretted having made us human beings (Genesis 6:5-6).

It wasn't until Jesus came that God could finally say, "With him I am well-pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Jesus, who was the Son

of God but was also completely human, pleased God!

Jesus loved to please his heavenly Father. Jesus said, "The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him" (John 8:29).

What was it about Jesus that pleased his heavenly Father? Can you list some things?

In 2 Corinthians 5:9 Paul writes, "We make it our goal to please [Jesus]." How satisfying it would be to hear Jesus say to us at the end of each day, "With you I am well pleased!" What could we do today that would please him?

*Jesus, as you pleased your Father in all you said and did, may we please you in what we do and say each day. Amen.*

## SWEET, DELICIOUS FRUIT!

*We have not stopped praying for you . . . so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord. . . .*  
—Colossians 1:9-10

Strawberries, plums, raspberries, apples—what's your favorite fruit? Prickly pear, mango, persimmon, guava—what a variety of fruit there is!

Why do we like fruit? Fruit is usually sweet and juicy—and good for us! And it goes well with other foods—ice cream, cereal, chocolate, yogurt. Fruit also makes a spinach salad interesting.

Today's reading tells us that bearing fruit is a sign of living a life worthy of the Lord. What we do and say will be as nutritious, as colorful, as sweet, and as pleasing as fruit can be. People at work, at school, or in the neighborhood will want to be around us when we live lives worthy of Jesus.

When Jesus came to live and teach among us, he provided hope, freedom, healing, for-

giveness, and life itself. Those were—and still are—some of the fruits he produced and made available. "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

Fruit is enjoyed not by the tree that produces it but by people who see it and pick it. To live lives worthy of the Lord is to say and do things that people notice and receive for their enjoyment and benefit. What nutritious sweetness might you bring into the life of someone today?

*Gracious God, you are the source of all that is sweet and nutritious and good. For your glory, produce good fruit in us so that your sweetness and health might be enjoyed by people we meet today. Amen.*

## CLOTHE YOURSELVES WITH COMPASSION

*As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion . . .*  
—Colossians 3:12

In Colossians 3 the apostle Paul gives us a list of sweet and nutritious fruit that Christians will produce in their lives—because the Spirit of God is working in them. The first item listed there is compassion. (Another well-known passage about spiritual fruit is Galatians 5:22-23.)

When Moses met with God on Mount Sinai, God described himself as “the compassionate and gracious God.” For us, to know that God is powerful is good; to know that God is compassionate is a great relief.

When Jesus saw crowds of people around him, he also “had compassion on them.” For us, to know that Jesus is God’s eternal Son is good; to know that Jesus is compassionate is liberating.

To “live a life worthy of the Lord” is to be compassionate. Would people who live and

work and play with me use that word to describe me? Would my neighbors use that word to describe the church I attend?

A compassionate person sees others not as competitors or as someone to defeat, not as consumers to sell something to, not as someone belonging to this or that ethnic group or social class. A compassionate person first of all sees others as persons who are loved by God and for whom Jesus has compassion.

What might the Holy Spirit need to do to make me more compassionate today?

*Lord Jesus, as you have looked at me with compassion, grace, and love, help me to see my loved ones—and even my enemies—with those same eyes. Amen.*

## CLOTHE YOURSELVES WITH KINDNESS

*As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with . . . kindness . . .*  
—Colossians 3:12

Paul reminded Titus that at one time they were foolish and ungodly—"disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures." Ouch! That was probably a painful reminder. Paul also would have insisted that we are included in that description too!

But then "the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared," and now through God's power and because of Jesus, we can be transformed!

God does the unexpected. He comes to us with kindness and love, for he is "God our Savior," who "saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy."

The German philosopher Nietzsche hated Christianity because it encouraged kindness. He rejected the biblical concept of love because, he said, it

drained strong people by making them kind, driving them to waste their energies on lepers, cripples, and oppressed people.

How thankful we can be that God comes to us with kindness in his heart and in his hands. We need a God who is kind.

What's more, our nations, our communities, and our families constantly need people who are willing to "waste their energy" by being kind.

Let's see how many people we can be kind to today.

*Gracious God, may your kindness gladden our hearts and soften our words and so be an unexpected gift to people today. In the name of our kind Savior we pray. Amen.*

## CLOTHE YOURSELVES WITH HUMILITY

*As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with . . . humility, gentleness . . .* —Colossians 3:12

Living a life worthy of the Lord requires us to be humble and gentle, for the Lord said it of himself: "I am gentle and humble in heart."

This is the Lord to whom "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given" (Matthew 28:18). Yet because there is humbleness and gentleness in his heart, that authority will be used in ways that honor and serve God and care for everything in God's creation. And when Jesus says, "Come to me," we can go to him knowing that he will be humble and gentle with us and that we can rest in him. He will bear our burdens with us.

Make sure you find time to rest with our humble and gentle Lord today.

Then ask yourself, How many people will I encounter today

who feel the heaviness of a lifelong illness, a marriage in trouble, an addicted spouse, financial difficulties, or guilt over bad decisions they have made? How many people will I encounter today who need someone with whom they can find a minute or two of rest?

Would they feel free to come to me? Would they find me to be "gentle and humble in heart"?

How could Jesus, through me, give them rest?

*Thank you, Jesus, for the rest I find in you. May I, with humbleness and gentleness of heart, help others to find the rest they need in you. In your name, Amen.*

## CLOTHE YOURSELVES WITH GENTLENESS

*As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with . . . gentleness . . .*  
—Colossians 3:12

“Come to me . . .” Jesus says. “I am gentle” (Matthew 11:28-29). I wouldn’t dare go to Jesus if he weren’t gentle, would you?

He is the Lord, the one with judgment and salvation in his hand. He knows my thoughts and everything I’ve done. He knows my few strengths and my many weaknesses. Because my life and destiny are in his hands, I pray that he be gentle.

God tells Isaiah that his servant, the coming Messiah, will not break “a bruised reed.” A bruised reed is one that is bent, cracked and therefore no good for weaving into a basket or making into paper. It’s useless, so why not just break it and throw it away? But in Jesus’ gentle hands, none of us who are bent over by life’s difficulties or broken by bad decisions is ever thrown away.

“A smoldering wick he will not snuff out.” What do you do with a wick that is barely burning, not giving much light anymore, and filling the room with smoke? Why not blow it out and use a better candle? No matter how feeble we are, no matter how useless we might feel, Jesus never does that to us.

Many of us can testify that Jesus has been very gentle with us. In turn, we can and should be gentle with one another, especially with the bruised reeds and smoldering wicks around us. Can you do that today?

*Strong and powerful Lord, thank you for being gentle with me. May my attitudes, words, and actions today be shaped by your gentleness. Amen.*

## COUNT TO FORTY

*As God's chosen people . . . clothe yourselves with compassion . . . humility . . . patience.*  
—Colossians 3:12

"Have patience, have patience; don't be in such a hurry!" When our children were small, we often sang that song together. And today we often say to ourselves, "Count to ten!" to avoid doing something unwise if we are upset.

God didn't count to ten when he saw the wickedness of the ancient city of Nineveh; he counted to forty. God sent Jonah to tell the people of Nineveh that they had forty days before being destroyed. During those forty days the people repented. So God did not destroy them. The Lord counted to forty, giving them a chance to change and live.

That made Jonah so angry that he wanted to die! Why? Because he knew that God was "slow to anger" and "gracious and compassionate." He knew that God might give them a

second chance, and Jonah wanted Nineveh destroyed.

God said of himself that he is "slow to anger" (Exodus 34:6). God doesn't have a short fuse; he doesn't suddenly explode when we do something wrong. God is patient with us sinners. That doesn't mean God merely shrugs his shoulders, as if it doesn't really matter what we do. No, God hates evil and will do away with it all someday. But he counts to forty, giving us time to change.

Can we be as patient as God is with others?

*Patient God, I find it easy to criticize and condemn what others do. Help me to count to forty, or more, if necessary, and to be as patient with others as you are with me. Amen.*

## HOW LONG, O LORD!

*As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with . . . patience.*  
—Colossians 3:12

Have you ever lost patience with God? The Old Testament prophet Habakkuk did. Habakkuk lived during a time of violence, war, and death. God's people were suffering . . . and it seemed that God wasn't doing anything about it.

Habakkuk couldn't understand it. He knew that God was powerful and that God loved his people. They desperately needed God's help, but it wasn't coming. Habakkuk finally couldn't take it anymore. "How long, Lord," he cried. "How long . . . must I call for help, but you do not listen?"

- God promised to rid this world of its violence, but the world is violent still.
- God promised to put an end to death, but we still get sick and our loved ones die.
- Jesus said, "I am coming soon!" But that was 2,000 years ago.

How long are we to wait for those promises to come true?

- We pray for our sons, our daughters, every day, but nothing seems to change.
- We pray for an end to poverty and disease, to famines and wars . . . but these horrors continue to plague us.

How long are we to wait for God's promises to come true? Maybe a long time. God is patient with us; can we be patient with him? We, along with Habakkuk, need to say, "Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior."

*Dear Lord, come today with your kingdom of justice and peace and life. But if not today, give us patience, as we wait for that glorious day. Amen.*

## DO I HAVE TO PUT UP WITH THAT?

*As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved . . . . bear with each other . . . .*  
 —Colossians 3:12-13

Does he have to play the drums so loud? Why is she playing that hymn so slowly? And why does he talk so much? And she's always late! And . . .

Paul urges us to "carry each other's burdens" (Galatians 6:2). I suppose that's the right thing to do. But does that mean I have to put up with the questions she's always asking and the way he runs a meeting? Yes, I do. As long as central Christian values are not at stake, Paul wants us to "bear with each other."

In any group there will be people who do things that annoy us, whose habits we find irritating, who don't do things "the right way." In any group we will do and say things that others will find strange and maybe even bizarre. But because we are sisters and brothers in Christ, they will put up with us and we will put up with them.

The verb "bear with" is in the present tense, meaning that we must continue to put up with each other day after day. We must not allow irritations and annoyances to disturb our fellowship or diminish our love for each other.

Sometimes that's not an easy thing to do. But if, in God's strength, we have clothed ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, it can be done!

*Thank you, Lord, that people put up with the strange things I like and the weird things I do. Help me to put up with the shortcomings of others too. Amen.*

## “NEITHER DO I CONDEMN YOU”

*As God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved . . . forgive one another . . . as the Lord forgave you. —Colossians 3:12-13*

The religious leaders brought a woman to Jesus, hoping that his response would give them something they could use to trap him. “This woman is guilty of adultery,” they said, in effect, “and the law says she should be executed. What do you say, Jesus?”

In Jesus’ day, a judge would be seated as he heard a case. When it was time to give his verdict, he would stand to pronounce it. When the religious leaders brought this woman to Jesus, he was seated. Now they demanded that Jesus be a judge and pronounce a verdict.

Jesus bent down and wrote on the ground with his finger. What did he write? We aren’t told. But the leaders kept questioning him, so he “straightened up” (probably standing) and pronounced his verdict: “Let any of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at

her.” Then Jesus “stooped down and wrote on the ground” again—and everyone, convicted by Jesus, left.

Jesus and the woman were now alone, and Jesus stood to pronounce his verdict on her: “Neither do I condemn you. . . . Go now and leave your life of sin.”

Amazing, isn’t it? Jesus, the only one who was without sin, did not condemn the woman. His judgment was forgiveness!

Do you need to hear Jesus say, “I do not condemn you”? And doesn’t his forgiveness amaze us again and again?

*Tell me again, Jesus, that you do not condemn me. Set me free from my sin and empower me not to sin again. Amen.*

**A NEW WAY!**

*As God's chosen people . . . forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

*—Colossians 3:12-13*

The rules of the game were clear: if you got a loan, you paid it back at the promised time. In Jesus' story, a servant owed his king a large sum of money, but he couldn't pay it back at the appointed time.

So the servant pleaded, "Be patient with me . . . and I will pay back everything." He didn't argue about the amount. He simply asked for more time.

Now, to continue playing this game, the king could either give the servant more time or sell the servant for whatever he could get. But he knew that the servant would never be able to pay him back, and the second option was extremely harsh.

So the king decided to do things a new way. He forgave the debt and allowed the servant to go free!

The servant then met someone who owed him a small amount of money. But when the other man pleaded for more time to pay it back, the servant refused and sent the man to prison.

When the king heard about this, he was furious. "I started a new thing by showing you forgiveness," he said, in effect, "but you insisted on punishing another person for the same thing. So have it your way! Off you go to jail!"

Has God forgiven us? Can we forgive others? Forgiveness is a new way of life and love, a gift we can give to everyone.

*Gracious God, thank you for the undeserved gift of forgiveness. Help us to follow your example and pass this gift along to others. Amen.*

## HIS LOVE IS EVERLASTING

*As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved . . . put on love.*

—Colossians 3:12-14

We are privileged to know many wonderful things about God. God is the almighty creator (Genesis 1-2); God is majestic and glorious (see Psalm 97); God is eternal, immortal, and invisible (1 Timothy 1:17).

The Lord is also a personal God with deep feelings: he hears the groaning of his oppressed people and becomes so concerned that he sets out to deliver them. God is compassionate, and he gets angry at injustice.

But one thing about God stands out beyond all others: love.

God's love is steadfast; it "endures forever." God's love is unending; it keeps coming back even when we reject it and seem to extinguish it with our sins.

We can see God's love powerfully expressed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, who reveals the very nature of God.

"God is love," says 1 John 4:16.

God's creative, strong, rescuing, self-giving love describes who God is and shows that his love stands at the center of reality.

God's love is therefore also at the center of our lives, shaping us, restoring us, being the source of all we think, say, and do.

May the strong love of God comfort you, shape you, and guide you today.

*Powerful, majestic God, out of love you created us, in love you saved us, and with your love you want us to live. May that be our desire each day. Amen.*

**TO BE LOVED TO THE END!**

*As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved . . . put on love.*

—Colossians 3:12-14

If we are to live lives worthy of Jesus, we must love. Why? Because Jesus loved. When asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus simply answered: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” . . . And . . . “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39).

The Father loved Jesus (“This is my Son, whom I love”—Matthew 3:17), and Jesus loved his heavenly Father (“I love the Father”—John 14:31). They lived in love with one another, and acted out of their mutual love.

Do you think it might have been harder for Jesus to love us than it was to love his Father? After all, Israel's leaders wanted him dead; the once adoring crowds turned against him and asked for his crucifixion; even his disciples abandoned him.

Jesus actually became accursed for us, taking on our sin and dying in our place. And by the power of God he rose again from the dead! (See Acts 2:22-32; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13.)

Thankfully, Jesus did not stop loving us, no matter what we did to him. He loved us “to the end” (John 13:1), through his sufferings, through his agonizing death, to the end that was his resurrection.

Praise God! Nothing could stop Jesus from loving us. He is alive, and he loves us still.

*Dear Jesus, we cannot understand why you loved us when we did not deserve your love, but we are deeply grateful. Empower us by your Spirit to love deeply, as you love us. Amen.*

## HOW DOES THAT HAPPEN?

*"I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first."*  
—Revelation 2:4

It appears that the apostle Paul spent more time with the church in Ephesus than with any other (see Acts 19:8-10). He wrote the believers there a wonderful letter in which he prayed that they might "grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge" (Ephesians 3:18-19).

Later Jesus said about that same church: "I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. . . . You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name . . . . Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first."

Did Jesus mean that members of that church no longer loved each other or that they no longer loved him—or both? Did they love someone or something new? Jesus did not say that his love had abandoned

them; that will never happen. But he said that this church set aside or discarded, their love.

How does it happen that an individual or a church stops loving the Savior who loves them so much? How long does it take?

Paul urges us to "put on love" every hour, every day, continually (see Colossians 3:14). And the love he has in mind is not our love but God's love, Jesus' love. Put his love on; live in and out of God's love. Doing that, we won't hear Jesus say to us what he sadly had to say to the church in Ephesus.

*Dear Jesus, alert us if we begin to show signs of forsaking our love for you. May we make and keep your love central in our lives. Amen.*

**“PEACE BE WITH YOU!”**

*As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved . . . let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.*  
—Colossians 3:12-15

It was Easter Sunday, and the disciples were afraid that those who had killed Jesus might now come for them. They were afraid of powerful people and deadly forces outside, so they went inside and locked the door. Fear locks doors.

But Someone came in anyway! It was Jesus—coming from the outside, through the locked door, and into the room! The first thing he said was “Peace be with you!” Then he showed them his hands and his side.

We can understand why he would say, “Peace be with you!”—for his disciples were afraid. But why show them his hands and side? Because on them were the scars of what the most powerful, evil, and deadly forces did to try to silence him and get rid of him.

Yet there he was—alive!—with scars from their attacks, but nothing more. Those forces couldn't stop him.

We need to hear those words too. Peace be with you, scared disciples! There is no one and no thing that can defeat you or do you ultimate harm. They couldn't stop Jesus, and they can't stop you!

Jesus doesn't want his followers to be afraid. After all, who or what is there to be afraid of, now that Jesus has proved he is stronger than all other powers and deadly forces?

*Jesus, some of us face political danger or family opposition because we are your disciples. Others of us fear ridicule, rejection, or embarrassment. Take away our fears, and grant us your peace, we pray. Amen.*

## **“PEACE BE WITH YOU!” (AGAIN)**

*As God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved . . . let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.*  
—Colossians 3:12-15

Twice on the first Easter Sunday, Jesus said to his disciples, “Peace be with you!”

The first time Jesus said it, he took away the disciples’ fear.

As he said it the second time, we can almost hear the lock turn and see the door open. For after saying “Peace be with you!” this second time, Jesus immediately added, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

Where? Outside!

Jesus doesn’t want his followers locked up in a room, afraid of what’s outside. He wants us outside, in the world—the world his Father loves and wants to redeem.

“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

Wouldn’t it be easier for most of us if Jesus had said, “As the

Father has sent me, so I am sending a couple of you; the rest of you can stay safely inside”?

But Jesus wants us all outside!

As his disciples, we come inside, into our churches, to be forgiven, encouraged, instructed, and blessed. Then we are sent outside, to our factories, farms, schools, homes, and other workplaces, where we speak and act like Jesus did. And as we go out, we hear Jesus say, “Peace be with you, out here, and ‘I am with you always’” (see Matthew 28:20).

*Dear Jesus, thank you that your peace goes with us wherever we go today. May I live with you and for you, held securely by your peace. Amen.*

**SO MANY GIFTS!**

*As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved . . . be thankful.*

*—Colossians 3:12-15*

For Paul, thankfulness should describe how it is with us at the center of our lives: “Be thankful”—not, “Be nice,” or, “Be happy,” but, “Be thankful.”

That’s a challenge for us, isn’t it? We are not often encouraged to be thankful. We are more often told that we don’t have enough. There’s always a better car to buy, new fashions to keep up with, more money to make. It’s hard to be thankful when we’re busy trying to get what other people say we need.

We can’t buy thankfulness. We can’t go to our neighbor and ask to borrow a cup of thankfulness if we happen to be a bit short of it.

Thankfulness is not something outside of us; it’s inside, fighting with greed and desire and self-indulgence for the central place in our hearts.

Thankfulness is that attitude of the heart that sees the people around us as special gifts from God: our family members, our friends, our coworkers. Thankfulness sees God’s gifts and blessings everywhere: in nature, in people, in the things we have, in the things others have. We are gladdened by a telephone call, encouraged by a visit. We are surrounded by gifts, so we are thankful people.

Take note of the gifts you receive today, and be thankful for them!

*Loving God, you bless us with wonderful gifts. We see them everywhere! Family, friends, work—and most important—your Son and his gift of life. Receive our thanks from the depths of our hearts. Amen.*

## WHEN BEING THANKFUL IS DIFFICULT

*As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved . . . be thankful.*

—Colossians 3:12-15

“Be thankful,” Paul urges us.

But let's not go too fast. It's a lot easier for some of us to be thankful than for others. For some of us, our lives are going smoothly. Our kids are well-adjusted; our marriages are strong; our jobs are rewarding. For us, being thankful isn't very difficult, and our thankfulness is sincere and genuine. That's good.

For others of us, though, it's not quite so easy. People close to us don't act as gifts should act. They betray our trust, take advantage of us, treat us shabbily. Our jobs have more drudgery in them than rewards, but it's too late to change them now. Our health is slipping, and our loved ones live far away. How can we be thankful when so little around us seems worth giving thanks for?

Paul would surely understand, because he often faced things in his life that could hardly be classified as gifts: beatings, imprisonment, shipwreck, ridicule.

Yet he still says, “Be thankful.” And he himself was thankful. Why? Because he knew that his Lord, who deeply loved him, was aware of every bad event in his life, ready to help, determined sooner or later to make it all right.

Pray today for people you know whose lives are difficult. Pray that those difficulties will not extinguish their thankfulness.

*Compassionate and loving Lord, may your loving presence be with \_\_\_\_\_, who faces so many challenges today. Show me how I might be able to help. In your name, Amen.*

## “MY LORD AND MY GOD!”

*As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved . . . let the message of Christ dwell among you richly. —Col. 3:12-16*

In order to live lives worthy of the Lord, we must allow the message of Jesus to take up permanent residence in us and among us.

We should start with what Jesus says about himself. In our reading today he says, “I am the bread of life.” Jesus also says, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12); “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11, 14); “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25); “I am the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6); “I am the true vine” (John 15:1); “I am the First and the Last; I am the Living One . . . I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades” (Revelation 1:17-18).

We should remember too what was written about Jesus: “He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made . . . In him was life, and

that life was the light of all people” (John 1:2-4).

Paul adds this about Jesus: “The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation” (Colossians 1:15).

And we can't forget what Thomas said to the risen Jesus: “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28).

Choose one or two of these phrases and then, for an entire day, repeat them again and again, letting the truth about Jesus dwell in you richly. See what effect that truth has on your life today.

*Jesus, today we meditate on who you are: the way, the truth, and the life; bread and light; the true vine; the Living One. May the truth about you dwell in us richly. Amen.*

## I TELL YOU . . .

*As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved . . . let the message of Christ dwell among you richly. —Col. 3:12-16*

Many voices clamor for our attention. The voices of our parents or other family members, our friends, our own desires, TV personalities, sports heroes, politicians—we might hear all of these in a typical day.

How often in a day do we also listen to Jesus?

Jesus has a lot to say to us: “You are the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” He also says, “I have not come to abolish [the Law] but to fulfill [it]” (Matt. 5:17). And “anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment” (5:22); “anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (5:28); “love your enemies” (5:44); “you cannot serve both God and Money” (Matthew 6:24); “do not worry . . . but seek first [God’s] kingdom and his righteousness”

(6:31-33); “love one another” (John 13:34)—and so much more.

Jesus promised to be with us always, to the end of this age (Matthew 28:20). That surely means he is with us now at work, at school, at home, at our favorite restaurant—wherever we are! What would he say about the evening news we’re watching, about the mess at the office, about what your group of friends wants to do this Friday?

Carry on a continual conversation with Jesus today. Listen for all the things he wants to say.

*Jesus, I'd like to have a conversation with you today. Tell me how you see things, what you would do here, what you would say there. Help me to be a listening disciple. Amen.*

## I WANT TO KNOW YOU

*Live a life worthy of the Lord . . . growing in the knowledge of God.*  
—Colossians 1:10

How many people do you know—really know? Three? Five? Ten? What does it mean to really know someone? It means at least that we know what they like and dislike, what they value, what their priorities and goals are. We know what they would say or do in this or that situation.

What does it take to get to know someone? To begin with, they must want us to know them. That is, they must be willing to tell us what they are really thinking and feeling. And we must want to know them.

Does God want us to know him? He does! “Let those who boast boast about this: that they understand and know me . . .” (Jeremiah 9:24). Has God told us things about himself? Read Exodus 34:6-7; Isaiah 43:1-4; Isaiah 58:6-9; John 3:16; and

1 John 4:7-19—and write down what God is like.

But do we really want to know God? The writer of Psalm 63 doesn’t say that he wants things from God or that he wants to know *about* God. The psalmist wants God: “Earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you.”

We are encouraged to ask God for things we need, but we are also given the greater privilege of knowing, really knowing, God.

God wants us to know him. How much do we really want to know him?

*Gracious God, I want to know you better. Help me to seek you with my whole being. Tell me again today who you are so that I may love you more. Amen.*

## KNOWING MORE ABOUT GOD

*"This is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."*  
—John 17:3

The beauty and complexity of nature tell us something about God. But there is much more to know about God than his creative power and design. The Bible tells us that God is holy and just and that he will not allow sin to destroy his creation. Still, there is much more to know about God than his righteous judgment.

The "more to know" is that God deeply loves us and desires above all that we be filled with his life.

Jesus knows that love because he has lived in it from all eternity. And Jesus wants us to know and live in the love and compassion of the Father. He wants us to be able to call God "our Father."

Likewise, the teachings of Jesus show that he is profoundly intelligent and wise. His miracles

show that he has extraordinary power.

But there is also much more to know about him. He is the very Son of God, sent by our Father to free us from the power of sin and death and to show us how to live as we were always meant to live.

To grow in the knowledge of God the Father and of Jesus Christ is to get closer and closer to who they are, to what they value, and to what they desire. It is to become more and more like them. Do you long for that today?

*Heavenly Father, loving Lord, draw us into a closer relationship with you so that we may know you better and have a deeper understanding of what you desire and what you value. Amen.*

## HOW WILL JESUS KNOW US?

*He replied, "Truly I tell you, I don't know you."*

—Matthew 25:12

To truly know God is to know him as a Father who loves us and wants us to be filled with his life. To truly know Jesus is to know him as the One sent by the Father to bring his love and life to us. "I have come that [you] may have life," Jesus said (John 10:10).

To truly know someone is to be in a relationship with them in which you share values and concerns. Sometimes we can't get to know people because we can't figure out why they think and act as they do. We are "wired differently."

In the parable of the ten virgins, Jesus says something very unsettling. He implies that if we are not ready for his coming, if we are unfaithful and prefer to go our own way rather than living God's way, there may be a time when he says to us, "I don't know you." In the end it will be

more important if Jesus can say, "I know you" than if we claim we can say, "I know Jesus."

How will Jesus know us?

Surely by recognizing his words in what we say and his love in what we do: bringing good news to the poor, feeding the hungry, showing hospitality to strangers, visiting the sick and those in prison, loving people as he did (see Matthew 25:31-40).

How are you showing that you really know Jesus?

*Dear Jesus, help me to live in a way that is faithful to you. Guide me to say and do things that show your love to others. In your name, Amen.*

## DO YOU WANT POWER?

*[Be] strengthened with all power according to his glorious  
might . . . .*  
—Colossians 1:11

“You will receive power,” Jesus told his disciples before returning to heaven. And who wouldn’t want that? It’s natural to want power to get what we want, or to make people do this or that. We might also want power to heal the sick, to stop wars, and to end poverty—the list could go on and on.

Jesus promised to give his disciples power—but to do what? To be his witnesses. Without power, they wouldn’t be true witnesses of Jesus. So they had to wait for the Holy Spirit to come and give them that power.

What does it mean to be a witness of Jesus? It means telling people about him, and it takes wise and courageous power to know when and how to do that well.

But witnessing also means living a life that reflects the truth

about Jesus—that he alone is our Lord, and that we do as he wants us to do.

And what does Jesus want us to do? He wants us to love our enemies, forgive one another, build up treasure in heaven rather than on earth, seek peace, show patience and kindness and compassion—again, the list could go on and on.

I need a power greater than my own to do any of that, don’t you? Thankfully we don’t have to wait for it—the Holy Spirit has already been given. We only have to be open to receive the Spirit’s power to work in us.

*Dear Jesus, thank you for calling me to be your witness today. Fill me with your Spirit’s power to witness well. Amen.*

## IT WON'T BE EASY

*[Be] strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance. . . . —Colossians 1:11*

Jesus calls us to be his witnesses, and we need the power of the Holy Spirit to do so.

Jesus also knows that living as his witnesses won't be easy. "In this world you will have trouble," he warns (John 16:33). People will "insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me" (Matthew 5:11). "You will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. . . . Brother will betray brother to death. . . . Everyone will hate you because of me." It wasn't easy being Jesus; it won't be easy being Jesus' witnesses.

In the book of Revelation we read of horrible calamities to come, and the writer says, "This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people" (Revelation 13:10; see 14:12). Those words echo

Jesus' words: "Those who stand firm to the end will be saved."

Jesus loved us all the way to the end (John 13:1), and now he asks us to stand firm for him all the way to the end. Can we do that? Not without the special power of the Holy Spirit.

Even in simpler situations—how I spend my money and my time, how I interact with my co-workers—how can I stand firm in my witness to Jesus? By the power of the Holy Spirit.

*Lord Jesus, you loved me all the way to the end, through persecution and death. Grant me the power to remain firm in my love for you all the way to the end. Amen.*

**YOU'VE GOT IT COMING!**

*In his great mercy [God] has given us . . . an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.*

—1 Peter 1:3-4

Most of us have a lot of things to thank God for—family, a home, food, clothing, just to name a few. But even if we have less to be thankful for than some people do, there's one thing that fills us with thanksgiving and hope and great joy: We've got an inheritance coming our way!

The great inheritance we read about in our Scripture today is the kingdom of God. There is a kingdom coming—a kingdom of justice and peace and abundant life, a kingdom without pain or sorrow or death. This kingdom will “never perish, spoil or fade.” And there's a place reserved in it for us!

It's not that we automatically had a reservation, but God made it possible through his Son, Jesus Christ, for us to receive this inheritance by believing in Jesus' power to save us. Jesus, the Son of God, came to

be one of us and to die in our place so that we won't have to bear the curse of sin and death.

It's good to be reminded again and again of our inheritance with all its brilliance and life, for, as Peter points out, sometimes our lives are filled with troubles. And those troubles can cast a shadow on our hope and our joy.

Our Lord is coming with an inheritance to share with us! When he comes, our joy will be deep and never-ending. May these truths lift your spirit and fill you with joy today!

*Lord, what a wonderful thing it is to look forward to your kingdom of peace and abundant life. Thank you for reserving a place in it for me. Help me to live for you in hope each day. Amen.*

## THE DARKNESS COULDN'T EXTINGUISH HIM!

*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*  
—John 1:5

In the creation story in Genesis we do not read that God created darkness but that God created light. Light has always been understood to be needed for life to emerge and develop. Darkness, on the other hand, has long been a symbol for non-life and for a power that seeks to extinguish life.

In the book of John we learn that Jesus is the light that comes into our world of darkness. And the darkness cannot overcome this light. The power of darkness tried its hardest to extinguish the “light of the world” (see John 8:12). For example, when the religious leaders came to arrest Jesus, he said, “This is your hour—when darkness reigns” (Luke 22:53).

But John, writing after Jesus’ death and resurrection, celebrates the fact that “the light shines in the darkness.” And

Jesus is still shining and will shine forever.

The darkness did not—and could not—extinguish him.

We need to be rescued from many things: ignorance, disease, bad decisions, and the like. But what we need most of all is deliverance from the power of darkness. Through sin and death, it seeks to destroy us.

The light of life has come and shines in the darkness! See him; move close to him; live in him today.

*Jesus, we confess that you are the light of the world. You are my light today. Help me to walk in your light and to be your light for others. Amen.*

## THE CLEANSING, LIFE-GIVING LIGHT

*Live as children of light.*

—Ephesians 5:8

There's something about the darkness that we don't like. "Things that go bump in the night" frighten us. But there's also something about the darkness that we do like. Darkness can keep others from seeing what we do. We human beings do things at night that we would never do during the day.

That's why, as Jesus says, even though the light has come into our darkness, some choose to stay in the dark. They (we?) feel safer there, safer because their thoughts and acts won't be exposed by the light.

Light disinfects; light exposes; light makes colors and shapes visible; light awakens our senses; light allows life to develop. Light and life are companions; darkness and death are allies.

We give thanks to the Father because he "rescued us from

the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves," the Son who is our light and our life (Colossians 1:13). Our thoughts, our words, our actions are now in the open for everyone to see and judge. We stand exposed so that the light might disinfect us, awaken us, display our remarkable colors. We now live in the light and as children of light; we shine in the darkness, exposing and cleansing and allowing life to grow.

It takes courage to come into the light, but that's where we find life!

*Grant us the courage, Lord, to come into your light and be disinfected and exposed. Take away all that is dark and shine the light of your life within us. Amen.*

**THESE GIFTS ARE OURS, RIGHT NOW!**

*In [Christ] we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

—Colossians 1:14

We have our ways of doing things; God has his. We want to earn what we get. God, knowing that we can never earn what we need, gives it to us as a gift.

Paul urges us to joyfully give thanks to the Father who has already qualified us “to share in the inheritance of his people,” has already rescued us from the powers of darkness, and has already “brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves” (Colossians 1:12-13). These are amazing things that God has already done for us.

Paul then reminds us of what we now have: we have redemption—we don’t have to wonder if it will ever come. It’s already accomplished, and it’s ours to celebrate! We have forgiveness of sins; it’s ours today, setting us free from guilt and shame, free to live for God and for others.

These gifts are available to us because of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. And they are ours when we are “in Christ”—that is, when we identify ourselves with Jesus, align our lives to his, and live with him and for him as our Lord and Savior. And because of these gifts, we joyfully give thanks to the Father.

Some people have characterized Christianity as a sour, joyless religion. But it is not that way at all—for, in Christ, we are full of joy and thanksgiving!

*Gracious, gift-giving God, with joyful thanks we receive and celebrate your life-giving gifts. In joyful gratitude we will share them with others today. Amen.*

## GOD'S DIVINE DANCE

*"The LORD your God . . . will rejoice over you with singing."*

—Zephaniah 3:17

A well-known catechism says we were made "to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." I think I know how to glorify God; I'm not so sure I know how to enjoy him. Fear God, respect God, worship God, give thanks to God—yes. Enjoy him? I have to learn how to do that better.

Might God enjoy us? God forgives us, watches over us, sometimes punishes us, always blesses us. But might he enjoy us too?

Zephaniah says that one day, when we are pure and healthy and full of life (as God created us to be), God will express his delight in us by singing! Can you imagine what that performance will be like! One Bible version translates Zephaniah 3:17 this way: "He will dance with shouts of joy for you" (Jerusalem Bible). Have you ever thought of God dancing with joy—for us?

Jesus' parable of the lost son gives us a picture of the amazing grace of God our Father (Luke 15:11-32). In the parable, when the father sees his rebellious son returning home, he runs toward him, throws his arms around him, and kisses him. The father is that excited to welcome his son home.

Our heavenly Father—indeed, all heaven—rejoices over every sinner who repents (see Luke 15:7, 10, 24, 32). Imagine the celebration when the Lord comes to live among us forever! (See Revelation 21-22.)

*Heavenly Father, we're not used to thinking of you singing or dancing over us. May we, in Christ, learn to delight in you as you already delight in us! Amen.*