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Introduction:

God has a very high opinion of his creation, man. As you read and meditate on Psalms 139, you will begin to understand how important you are to God and his plan.

The key verse in this study is Psalms 139:14.

Psalm 139:14

I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.

Follow a review of this chapter Psalms 1-15

O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. [2] Thou knowest my down sitting and mine uprising, thou understands my thought afar off. [3] Thou compass my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. [4] For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. [5] Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.

There are times when we don't let people get to know us completely because we are afraid they will discover something about us that they won't like. But God already knows everything about us, even to the number of hairs on our heads (Matthew 10:30), and still he accepts and loves us. God is with us through every situation, in every trial—protecting, loving, guiding. He knows and loves us completely.

[6] Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. [7] Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?

God is omnipresent—he is present everywhere. Because this is so, we can never be lost to his Spirit. This is good news to those who know and love God, because no matter what we do or where we go, we can never be far from God's comforting presence (see Romans 8:35-39).

[8] If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. [9] If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; [10] even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. [11] If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. [12] Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night sinneth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. [13] For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. [14] I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. [15] My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

God's character goes into the creation of every person. When you feel worthless, remember that God's Spirit is ready and willing to work within you. We should have as much respect for ourselves as our Maker has for us.

In the study we will see that God makes rich without adding sorrow.

Through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelations, we will find what people must be and do in order to be blessed.

Chapter 1

The Blessings of the Lord from the book of Law

A blessing is a favor or a gift bestowed by God, thereby bringing happiness..

Genesis 1:26-28

[26] And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. [27] So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.

God saw that his work was good. People sometimes feel guilty for having a good time or for feeling good about an accomplishment. This need not be so. Just as God felt good about his work, we can be pleased with ours. However, we should not feel good about our work if God would not be pleased with it.

Knowing that we are made in God's image and thus share many of his characteristics provides a solid basis for self-worth. Human worth is not based on possessions, achievements, physical attractiveness, or public acclaim. Instead it is based on being made in God's image. Because we bear God's image, we can feel positive about ourselves. Criticizing or downgrading ourselves is criticizing what God has made and the abilities he has given us. Knowing that you are a person of worth helps you love God, know him personally, and make a valuable contribution to those around you.

Genesis 12:2-3

And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: [3] And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curses thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

When God called him, Abram moved out in faith from Ur to Haran and finally to Canaan. God then established a covenant with Abram, telling him that he would found a great nation. Not only would this nation be blessed, God said, but the other nations of the earth would be blessed through Abram's descendants. Israel, the nation that would come from Abram, was to follow God and influence those with whom it came in contact. Through Abram's family tree, Jesus Christ was born to save humanity. Through Christ, people can have a personal relationship with God and be blessed beyond measure.

God promised to bless Abram and make him great, but there was one condition. Abram had to do what God wanted him to do. This meant leaving his home and friends and traveling to a new land where God promised to build a great nation from Abram's family. Abram obeyed, walking away from his home for God's promise of even greater blessings in the future. God may be trying to lead you to a place of greater service and usefulness for him. Don't let the comfort and security of your present position make you miss God's plan for you.

Genesis 22:15-18

And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, [16] And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: [17] That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; [18] And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

Abraham received abundant blessings because he did not hold back, but obeyed God. First, God gave Abraham's descendants the ability to conquer their enemies. Second, God promised Abraham children and grandchildren who would in turn bless the whole earth. People's lives would be changed as a result of knowing of the faith of Abraham and his descendants. Most often we think of blessings as gifts to be enjoyed. But when God blesses us, his blessings are intended to overflow to others.

Genesis 26:2-5

And the Lord appeared unto him, and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of: [3] Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father; [4] And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; [5] Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws. (NLT)

The blessing that God promised Abraham, was now being given to his son Isaac. This promise was also given to Jacob, the son of Isaac.

Numbers 6:24-26

The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: [25] The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: [26] The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

A blessing was one way of asking for God's divine favor to rest upon others. The ancient blessing in these verses helps us understand what a blessing was supposed to do. Its five parts conveyed hope that God would (1) bless and keep them (favor and protect); (2) make his face shine upon them (be pleased); (3) be gracious (merciful and compassionate); (4) turn his face toward them (give his approval); (5) give peace. When you ask God to bless others or yourself, you are asking him to do these five things. The blessing you offer will not only help the one receiving it, it will also demonstrate love, encourage others, and provide a model of caring to others.

Chapter 2

The Blessings of Abraham

Deut. 28:1-13

And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth:

Moses is speaking to the children of Israel, and preparing them to go into the Promised Land. In order to receive these promises, they must diligently hearken to the Lord their God is which he commanded to do.

[2] And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God.

If Israel would obey the voice of the Lord their God, the blessing would come upon Israel without a struggle.

These are blessing promised to the seed of Abraham and his descendants through their acceptance of Jesus Christ.

Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field.

[4] Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep.

[5] Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store.

[6] Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out.

[7] The Lord shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways.

[8] The Lord shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

[9] The Lord shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the Lord thy God, and walk in his ways. [10] And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name

of the Lord; and they shall be afraid of thee. [11] And the Lord shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the Lord sware unto thy fathers to give thee.

[12] The Lord shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow.

[13] And the Lord shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the Lord thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them:

The good news is that the blessings of Abraham might come through Jesus Christ. This is so we receive the Spirit through faith.

Galatians 3:9-14

So then those that are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham,

[10] For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.

[11] But no man is justified by the law in the sight of God. it is evident: for, the just shall live by faith.

[12] And the law is not of faith: but, the man that doeth them shall live in them.

[13] Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree:

[14] That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Galatians 3:29

And if ye be in Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

These blessings were for Abraham, or for those who would be blessed through the promises given to him.

Blessing in Genesis 12:1, was to the land that the Lord would show him.

We receive these blessings by allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us. Proverbs 3:5 says to trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding, 6) In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

The blessings of the Lord are given to us, so that we may be a blessing to others.

The second blessing God's was to give to Abraham is found in Genesis 12:2. In this promise, he was to become a great nation.

Philip. 4:19 But, my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

God knows we have needs. He wants us to have an abundant life.

John 10:10

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

Ephes. 3:20

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.

The fourth blessing God gave to Abraham was to make his name great. Those to seek to make their own name great may fail. We gladly make the name of Jesus Christ great.

The fifth blessing God gave to Abraham was that he would become a blessing.

God wants us to be a blessing to all people. He wants us to take the gospel to the world. The life he has given us needs to shine into a dark world.

The sixth blessing God offered to Abraham is found in Genesis 12:3.

God offered to bless all those who blessed Abraham. When we bless others, we can expect a blessing.

The seventh blessing that God gave Abraham was that all the families of the earth would be blessed. This blessing is through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Many curses were given to those who did not keep the laws of the Lord. Because Israel did not keep the laws, they were not blessed. Jesus came to the earth and became to curse for all who had disobeyed.

Chapter 3

Jesus Finished Work on the Cross

Jesus took all punishment for sins. We received the blessing that he deserved.

Hebrews 10:12-14

But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God; [13] From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his

footstool. [14] For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.

We have been made perfect, yet we are “being made holy.” Through his death and resurrection, Christ, once for all, made his believers perfect in God’s sight. At the same time, he is making them holy (progressively cleansed and set apart for his special use) in their daily pilgrimage here. We should not be surprised, ashamed, or shocked that we still need to grow. God is not finished with us. We can encourage this growth process by deliberately applying Scripture to all areas of our lives, by accepting the discipline and guidance Christ provides, and by giving him control of our desires and goals.

Romans 5:19

For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous?

What a promise this is to those who love Christ! We can reign over sin’s power, over death’s threats, and over Satan’s attacks. Eternal life is ours now and forever. In the power and protection of Jesus Christ, we can overcome temptation. See Romans 8:17 for more on our privileged position in Christ.

2 Cor. 5:21

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

When we trust in Christ, we make an exchange—our sin for his righteousness. Our sin was poured into Christ at his crucifixion. His righteousness is poured into us at our conversion. This is what Christians mean by Christ’s atonement for sin. In the world, bartering works only when two people exchange goods of relatively equal value. But God offers to trade his righteousness for our sin—something of immeasurable worth for something completely worthless. How grateful we should be for his kindness to us.

2 Cor. 8:9

For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

There is no evidence that Jesus was any poorer than most first-century Palestinians; rather, Jesus became poor by giving up his rights as God and

becoming human. In his incarnation God voluntarily became man—the wholly human person, Jesus of Nazareth. As a man, Jesus was subject to place, time, and other human limitations. He did not give up his eternal power when he became human, but he did set aside his glory and his rights.

In response to the Father’s will, he limited his power and knowledge. Christ became “poor” when he became human, because he set aside so much. Yet by doing so, he made us “rich” because we received salvation and eternal life.

What made Jesus’ humanity unique was his freedom from sin. In his full humanity, we can see everything about God’s character that can be conveyed in human term,

Isaiah 53:1-12 Who has believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?

This chapter continues to speak of the Messiah, Jesus, who would suffer for the sins of all people. Such a prophecy is astounding! Who would believe that God would choose to save the world through a humble, suffering servant rather than a glorious king? The idea is contrary to human pride and worldly ways. But God often works in ways we don’t expect. The Messiah’s strength is shown by humility, suffering, and mercy.

These things endure forever.

[2] For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him

There was nothing beautiful or majestic in the physical appearance of this servant. Israel would miscalculate the servant’s importance—they would consider him an ordinary man. But even though Jesus would not attract a large following based on his physical appearance, he would bring salvation and healing. Many people miscalculate the importance of Jesus’ life and work, and they need faithful Christians to point out his extraordinary nature.

[3] He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

This man of sorrows was despised and rejected by those around him, and he is still despised and rejected by many today. Some reject Christ by standing against him.

Others despise Christ and his great gift of forgiveness. Do you despise him, reject him, or accept him?

[4] Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. [5] But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed

How could an Old Testament person understand the idea of Christ dying for our sins (our transgressions and iniquities)—actually bearing the punishment that we deserved? The sacrifices suggested this idea, but it is one thing to kill a lamb, and something quite different to think of God’s chosen servant as that Lamb. But God was pulling aside the curtain of time to let the people of Isaiah’s day look ahead to the suffering of the future Messiah and the resulting forgiveness made available to all mankind.

[6] All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah speaks of Israel straying from God and compares them to wandering sheep. Yet God would send the Messiah to bring them back into the fold. We have the hindsight to see and know the identity of the promised Messiah who has come and died for our sins.

But if we can see all that Jesus did and still reject him, our sin is much greater than that of the ancient Israelites who could not see what we have seen. Have you given your life to Jesus Christ, the “good shepherd” (John 10:11-16), or are you still like a wandering sheep?

[7] He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

[8] He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. [9] And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

[10] Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

[11] He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

“My righteous servant will justify many” tells of the enormous family of believers who will become righteous, not by their own works, but by the Messiah’s great work on the cross. They are justified because they have claimed Christ, the righteous servant, as their Savior and Lord (see Romans 10:9; 2 Cor. 5:21). Their life of sin is stripped away, and they are clothed with Christ’s goodness (Ephes. 4:22-24).

[12] Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

In the Old Testament, people offered animals as sacrifices for their sins. Here, the sinless servant of the Lord offers himself for our sins. He is the Lamb (Isaiah 53:7) offered for the sins of all people (John 1:29; Rev. 5:6-14). The Messiah suffered for our sakes, bearing our sins to make us acceptable to God. What can we say to such love? How will we respond to him?

John 1:29

The next day John sees Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

From Isaiah 53, we see the price. Jesus prayed that we might have the many blessings he has given.

Jesus was cursed that we might be blessed.

He paid sins debt that we might become righteous.

He was despised, that we might, the loved.

He was rejected, that we might be favored.

Jesus carried our sorrows that we might be happy.

Jesus was familiar with suffering, so that our load would be light.

Jesus took our infirmities, so that we could be healthy.

God smote him, so that God could love us.

God wounded him so that we could be righteous.

Jesus was lashed for our healing that we might be free of every infirmity.

He was chastised for our peace.

He bore our iniquities, so that we might be free

He was made poor that we might become rich.

All these things Jesus suffered because of his great love for us.

Chapter 4

A Glimpse of Jesus in Heaven

Rev. 5:6-14

And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

The Lion, Jesus, proved himself worthy to break the seals and open the scroll by living a perfect life of obedience to God, dying on the cross for the sins of the world, and rising from the dead to show his power and authority over evil and death. Only Christ conquered sin, death, hell, and Satan himself; so only he can be trusted with the world's future. The Root of David refers to Jesus being from David's family line, thus fulfilling the promise of the Messiah in the Old Testament.

Jesus Christ is pictured as both a Lion (symbolizing his authority and power) and a Lamb (symbolizing his submission to God's will). One of the elders calls John to look at the Lion, but when John looks he sees a Lamb. Christ the Lamb was the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all mankind; therefore, only he can save us from the terrible events revealed by the scroll.

Christ the Lamb won the greatest battle of all. He defeated all the forces of evil by dying on the cross. The role of Christ the Lion will be to lead the battle where Satan is finally defeated (Rev. 19:19-21). Christ the Lion is victorious because of what Christ the Lamb has already done. We will participate in his victory not because of our effort or goodness, but because he has promised eternal life to all who believe in him.

John sees the Lamb "looking as if it had been slain;" the wounds inflicted on Jesus' body during his trial and crucifixion could still be seen (see John 20:24-31). Jesus was called the Lamb of God by John the Baptist (John 1:29). In the Old Testament, lambs were sacrificed to atone for sins: the Lamb of God died as the final sacrifice for all sins (see Isaiah 53:7; Hebrews 10:1-12, 18).

The horns symbolize strength and power (see 1 Kings 22:11; Zech. 1:18). Although Christ is a sacrificial lamb, he is in no way weak. He was killed, but now he lives in God's strength and power. In Zech. 4:2-10, the eyes are equated with the seven lamps and the one Spirit.

[7] And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. [8] And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints. [9] And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; [10] And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

People from every nation are praising God before his throne. God's message of salvation and eternal life is not limited to a specific culture, race, or country. Anyone who comes to God in repentance and faith is accepted by him and will be part of his kingdom. Don't allow prejudice or bias to keep you from sharing Christ with others. Christ welcomes all people into his kingdom.

The song of God's people praises Christ's work. He (1) was slain, (2) purchased them with his blood, (3) gathered them into a kingdom, (4) made them priests, and (5) appointed them to reign on the earth. Jesus has already died and paid the penalty for sin. He is now gathering us into his kingdom and making us priests. In the future we will reign with him. Worship God and praise him for what he has done, what he is doing, and what he will do for all who trust in him. When we realize the glorious future that awaits us, we will find the strength to face our present difficulties.

The believers' song praises Christ for bringing them into the kingdom and making them kings and priests. While now we are sometimes despised and mocked for our faith (John 15:17-27), in the future we will reign over all the earth (Luke 22:29-30). Christ's death made all believers priests of God—the channels of blessing between God and mankind (1 Peter 2:5-9).

[11] And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;

[12] Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

[13] And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.

Angels are spiritual beings created by God who help carry out his work on earth. They bring messages (Luke 1:26-28), protect God's people (Daniel 6:22), offer encouragement (Genesis 16:7ff), give guidance (Exodus 14:19), bring punishment (2 Samuel 24:16), patrol the earth (Ezekiel 1:9-14), and fight the forces of evil (2 Kings 6:16-18; Rev. 20:1). There are both good and evil angels (Rev. 12:7), but because evil angels are allied with Satan, they have considerably less power and authority than good angels. Eventually, the main role of the good angels will be to offer continuous praise to God (see also Rev. 19:1-3).

[14] And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.

The scene in Rev. 5 shows us that only the Lamb, Jesus Christ, is worthy to open the scroll (the events of history). Jesus, not Satan, holds the future. Jesus Christ is in control, and he alone is worthy to set into motion the events of the last days of history.

Chapter 5

The Sermon on the Mountain with blessings

Matthew 5:1-12

And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:

Matthew 5-7 is called the Sermon on the Mount because Jesus gave it on a hillside near Capernaum. This “sermon” probably covered several days of preaching. In it, Jesus proclaimed his attitude toward the law. Position, authority, and money are not important in his kingdom—what matters is faithful obedience from the heart. The Sermon on the Mount challenged the proud and legalistic religious leaders of the day. It called them back to the messages of the Old Testament prophets who, like Jesus, taught that heartfelt obedience is more important than legalistic observance.

[2] And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, [3] Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. [4] Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. [5] Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. [6]

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. [7] Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. [8] Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. [9] Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. [10] Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. [11] Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. [12] Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Jesus began his sermon with words that seem to contradict each other. But God's way of living usually contradicts the world's. If you want to live for God you must be ready to say and do what seems strange to the world. You must be willing to give when others take, to love when others hate, to help when others abuse. By giving up your own rights in order to serve others, you will one day receive everything God has in store for you.

There are at least four ways to understand the Beatitudes. (1) They are a code of ethics for the disciples and a standard of conduct for all believers. (2) They contrast kingdom values (what is eternal) with worldly values (what is temporary). (3) They contrast the superficial "faith" of the Pharisees with the real faith Christ wants. (4) They show how the Old Testament expectations will be fulfilled in the new kingdom. These beatitudes are not multiple choice—pick what you like and leave the rest. They must be taken as a whole. They describe what we should be like as Christ's followers.

Each beatitude tells how to be *blessed*. "Blessed" means more than happiness. It implies the fortunate or enviable state of those who are in God's kingdom. The Beatitudes don't promise laughter, pleasure, or earthly prosperity. To Jesus, "blessed" means the experience of hope and joy, independent of outward circumstances. To find hope and joy, the deepest form of happiness, follow Jesus no matter what the cost.

With Jesus' announcement that the kingdom was near (Matthew 4:17), people were naturally asking, "How do I qualify to be in God's kingdom?" Jesus said that God's kingdom is organized differently from worldly kingdoms. In the kingdom of heaven, wealth and power and authority are unimportant. Kingdom people seek different blessings and benefits, and they have different attitudes. Are your attitudes a carbon copy of the world's selfishness, pride, and lust for power, or do they reflect the humility and self-sacrifice of Jesus, your King?

Jesus said to rejoice when we're persecuted. Persecution can be good because (1) it takes our eyes off earthly rewards, (2) it strips away superficial belief, (3) it strengthens the faith of those who endure, and (4) our attitude through it serves as an example to others who follow. We can be comforted to know that God's greatest prophets were persecuted (Elijah, Jeremiah, Daniel). The fact that we are being persecuted proves that we have been faithful; faithless people would be unnoticed. In the future God will reward the faithful by receiving them into his eternal kingdom where there is no more persecution.

In his longest recorded sermon, Jesus began by describing the traits he was looking for in his followers. He called those who lived out those traits blessed because God had something special in store for them. Each beatitude is an almost direct contradiction of society's typical way of life

Chart from Tyndale Commentary:

CHART: KEY LESSONS FROM THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

<i>Beatitude</i>	Poor in spirit (Matt. 5:3)
<i>Old Testament anticipation</i>	Isaiah 57:15
<i>Clashing worldly values</i>	Pride and personal independence
<i>God's reward</i>	Kingdom of heaven
<i>How to develop this attitude</i>	James 4:7-10
<hr/>	
<i>Beatitude</i>	<i>Mourning</i> (Matt. 5:4)
<i>Old Testament anticipation</i>	Isaiah 61:1-2
<i>Clashing worldly values</i>	Happiness at any cost
<i>God's reward</i>	Comfort (2 Cor. 1:4)
<i>How to develop this attitude</i>	Psalm 51, James 4:7-10
<hr/>	
<i>Beatitude</i>	Meekness (Matt. 5:5)
<i>Old Testament anticipation</i>	Psalm 37:5-11
<i>Clashing worldly values</i>	Power
<i>God's reward</i>	Inherit the earth

<i>How to develop this attitude</i>	Matt. 11:27-30
<i>Beatitude</i>	Righteousness (Matt. 5:6)
<i>Old Testament anticipation</i>	Isaiah 11:4-5; 42:1-4
<i>Clashing worldly values</i>	Pursuing personal needs
<i>God's reward</i>	Filled (satisfied)
<i>How to develop this attitude</i>	John 16:5-11; Phil. 3:7-11
<i>Beatitude</i>	Mercy (Matt. 5:7)
<i>Old Testament anticipation</i>	Psalms 41:1
<i>Clashing worldly values</i>	Strength without feeling
<i>God's reward</i>	Be shown mercy
<i>How to develop this attitude</i>	Ephes. 5:1-2
<i>Beatitude</i>	Pure in heart (Matt. 5:8)
<i>Old Testament anticipation</i>	Psalms 24:3-4; 51:10
<i>Clashing worldly values</i>	Deception is acceptable
<i>God's reward</i>	See God
<i>How to develop this attitude</i>	1 John 3:1-3
<i>Beatitude</i>	Peacemaker (Matt. 5:9)
<i>Old Testament anticipation</i>	Isaiah 57:18-19; 60:17
<i>Clashing worldly values</i>	Personal peace is pursued without concern for the world's chaos
<i>God's reward</i>	Be called sons of God
<i>How to develop this attitude</i>	Romans 12:9-21;

<i>attitude</i>	Hebrews 12:10-11
<i>Beatitude</i>	Persecuted (Matt. 5:10)
<i>Old Testament anticipation</i>	Isaiah 52:13; 53:12
<i>Clashing worldly values</i>	Weak commitments
<i>God's reward</i>	Inherit the kingdom of heaven
<i>How to develop this attitude</i>	2 Tim. 3:12

In the last beatitude, Jesus even points out that a serious effort to develop these traits is bound to create opposition. The best example of each trait is found in Jesus himself. If our goal is to become like him, the Beatitudes will challenge the way we live each day.

Chapter 6

Promised Blessings of Prosperity

Proverbs 10:22 The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.

God supplies most people with the personal and financial abilities to respond to the needs of others. If we all realized how God has blessed us, and if we all used our resources to do God's will, hunger and poverty would be wiped out. Wealth is a blessing only if we use it in the way God intended.

Deut. 8:18

But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day.

In times of plenty, we often take credit for our prosperity and become proud that our own hard work and cleverness have made us rich. It is easy to get so busy collecting and managing wealth that we push God right out of our lives. But it is God who gives us everything we have, and it is God who asks us to manage it for him.

Proverbs 8:21

That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures.

Joshua 1:8

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

Many people think that prosperity and success come from having power, influential personal contacts, and a relentless desire to get ahead. But the strategy for gaining prosperity that God taught Joshua goes against such criteria. He said that to succeed Joshua must (1) be strong and courageous because the task ahead would not be easy, (2) obey God's law, and (3) constantly read and study the Book of the Law—God's Word.

To be successful, follow God's words to Joshua. You may not succeed by the world's standards, but you will be a success in God's eyes—and his opinion lasts forever.

Malachi 3:10

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

Malachi urged the people to stop holding back their tithes, to stop keeping from God what he deserved. The tithing system began during the time of Moses (Leviticus 27:30-34; Deut. 14:22). The Levites received some of the tithe because they could not possess land of their own (Numbers 18:20-21).

During Malachi's day, the people were not giving tithes, so the Levites went to work to earn a living, thereby neglecting their God-given responsibilities to care for the temple and for the service of worship. Everything we have is from God; so when we refuse to return to him a part of what he has given, we rob him.

“Give, and it will be given to you,” he says (Luke 6:38). When we give, we must remember that the blessings God promises are not always material and may not be experienced completely here on earth, but we will certainly receive them in our future life with him.

Matthew 19:29

And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

Jesus assured the disciples that anyone who gives up something valuable for his sake will be repaid many times over in this life, although not necessarily in the same form. For example, his or her family may reject a person for accepting Christ, but he or she will gain the larger family of believers and become a joint heir with Jesus Christ.

Psalm 122:6

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee.

The psalmist was not praying for his own peace and prosperity, but for that of his brothers and friends in Jerusalem. This is intercessory prayer, prayer on behalf of others. Too often we are quick to pray for our own needs and desires, and omit interceding for others. Will you intercede for someone in need today?

The peace sought in these verses is much more than the mere absence of conflict. It suggests completeness, health, justice, prosperity, and protection. The world cannot provide this peace. Real peace comes from faith in God because he alone embodies all the characteristics of peace. To find peace of mind and peace with others, you must find peace with God.

This prayer is fulfilled with a promise of prosperity.

3 John 1:2

Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.

John was concerned for Gaius's physical *and* spiritual well-being. This was the opposite of the popular heresy that taught the separation of spirit and matter and despised the physical side of life. Today, many people still fall into this way of thinking. This non-Christian attitude logically leads to one of two responses: neglect of the body and physical health, or indulgence of the body's sinful desires. God is concerned for both your body and your soul. As a responsible Christian, you should neither neglect nor indulge yourself, but care for your physical needs and discipline your body so that you are at your best for God's service.

For a more complete study of the blessings of prosperity, please read my book titled: "God gives Prosperity".

Chapter 7

The Fruits of the Spirit

Galatians 5:22-25

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, [23] Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. [24] And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. [25] If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

The fruit is what the tree or the vine produces. Believers are the branches. When a branch is severed from the vine, it cannot bare fruit. May each of these nine listed fruits nourish others and bless them as you are blessed and nourished.

The gifts of the spirit as recorded in I Corinthians are given, but the fruits of the spirit as recorded in Galatians 5:22-25 must be developed.

The greatest fruit is love. All the gifts must be developed through love. Without love, the other gifts are ineffective.

Gentleness

The reason God wants his believers to bare fruit are to bless others. Jesus had a gentle spirit, so those who love and serve him should also manifest a spirit of gentleness. This fruit is greatly needed in a harsh and demanding world.

Matthew 11:29-30

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. [30] For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

A yoke is a heavy wooden harness that fits over the shoulders of an ox or oxen. It is attached to a piece of equipment the oxen are to pull. A person may be carrying heavy burdens of (1) sin, (2) excessive demands of religious leaders (Matthew 23:4; Acts 15:10), (3) oppression and persecution, or (4) weariness in the search for God.

Jesus frees people from all these burdens. Jesus promises love, healing, and peace with God, not the end of all labor. A relationship with God changes meaningless, wearisome toil into purpose.

Philip. 4:5 Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.

Ultimate joy comes from Christ dwelling within us. Christ is near, and at his second coming we will fully realize this ultimate joy. He who lives within us will fulfill his final purposes for us.

We are to be gentle (reasonable, fair minded, and charitable) to those outside the church, and not just to fellow believers. This means we are not to seek revenge against those who treat us unfairly

1 Peter 3:15

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

Some Christians believe that faith is a personal matter that should be kept to oneself. It is true that we shouldn't be boisterous or obnoxious in sharing our faith, but we should always be ready to give an answer, gently and respectfully, when asked about our faith, our life-style, or our Christian perspective. Can others see your hope in Christ? Are you prepared to tell them what Christ has done in your life?

Titus 3:2

To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men.

As Christians, our first allegiance is to Jesus as Lord, but we must obey our government and its leaders as well. Christians are not above the law. Obeying the civil law is only the beginning of our Christian responsibility; we must do what we can to be good citizens. In a democracy, this means participation and willingness to serve.

James 3:17

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

The depth of a person's character can measure true wisdom. Just as you can identify a tree by the type of fruit it produces, you can evaluate your wisdom by the way you act. Foolishness leads to disorder, Careful, winsome speech and wise, loving words are the seeds of peace. God loves peacemakers (Matthew 5:9).

Galatians 6:1

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

No Christian should ever think that he or she is totally independent and doesn't need help from others, and no one should feel excused from the task of helping others. The body of Christ—the church—functions only when the members work together for the common good. Do you know someone who needs help? Is there a Christian brother or sister who needs correction or encouragement? Humbly and gently reach out to that person (John 13:34-35).

Romans 13:4-5

For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. [5] Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

When civil rulers are unjust, upright people are afraid. In these verses, Paul is talking about officials who are doing their duty. When these officials are just, people who are doing right have nothing to fear.

John 16:33

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

The disciples scattered after Jesus was arrested (see Mark 14:50).

Jesus summed up all he had told them this night, tying together themes from John 14:27-29; John 16:1-4; and John 16:9-11. With these words he told his disciples to take courage. In spite of the inevitable struggles they would face, they would not be alone. Jesus does not abandon us to our struggles either. If we remember that the ultimate victory has already been won, we can claim the peace of Christ in the most troublesome times.

Chapter 8

The Fruit of the Holy Spirit Brings Blessings

Galatians 5:22-25

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, [23] Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. [24] And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. [25] If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Longsuffering

John 15:5

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

Long suffering can only be manifested. When we are connected to vine. Jesus is the vine.

Some say that longsuffering is love on trial. As with other manifestations of spiritual fruit, you cannot produce it in your own ability.

Patients should also be considered as long-suffering. It is being gentle, and constant in all circumstances. The test of patience is not in waiting, but it is how one acts while he or she is waiting. Seek to manifest the fruit of long-suffering.

Psalm 119:165

Great peace has they that love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.

Modern society longs for peace of mind. Here is clear-cut instruction on how to attain this: if we love God and obey his laws, we will have “great peace.” Trust in God, who alone stands above the pressures of daily life and gives us full assurance.

Col. 1:11

Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness;

Colossians has two dimensions: (1) that they might be filled with the knowledge of God's will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding, and (2) that they would bear fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God. Knowledge is not merely to be accumulated; it should give us direction for living. Paul wanted the Colossians to be wise, but he also wanted them to *use* their knowledge. Knowledge of God is not a secret that only a few can discover; it is open to everyone. God wants us to learn more about him, and also to put belief into practice by helping others. This often requires patience.

James 1:4

But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

We can't really know the depth of our character until we see how we react under pressure. It is easy to be kind to others when everything is going well, but can we still be kind when others are treating us unfairly? God wants to make us mature and complete, not to keep us from all pain. Instead of complaining about our struggles, we should see them as opportunities for growth. Thank God for promising to be with us in rough times. Ask him to help you solve your problems or to give you the strength to endure them. Then be patient. God will not leave us alone with your problems; he will stay close and help us grow.

Hebrews 2:10

For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

How was Jesus made perfect through suffering? Jesus' suffering made him a perfect leader, or pioneer, of our salvation (see the notes on +Hebrews 5:8 and +Hebrews 5:9). Jesus did not need to suffer for his own salvation, because he was God in human form. His perfect obedience (which led him down the road of suffering) demonstrates that he was the complete sacrifice for us. Through suffering, Jesus completed the work necessary for our own salvation. Our suffering can make us more sensitive servants of God. People who have known pain are able to reach out with compassion to others who hurt. If you have suffered, ask God how your experience can be used to help others.

Romans 2:4

Or despises thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?

Romans 8:28-29

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. [29] For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

God works in “all things”—not just isolated incidents—for our good. This does not mean that all that happens to us is good. Evil is prevalent in our fallen world, but God is able to turn every circumstance around for our long-range good. Note that God is not working to make us happy, but to fulfill his purpose. Note also that this promise is not for everybody. Only those who love God and are called according to his purpose can claim it. Those who are “called” are those that the Holy Spirit convinces and enables to receive Christ. Such people have a new perspective, a new mind-set on life. They trust in God, not life’s treasures; they look for their security in heaven, not on earth; they learn to accept, not resent, pain and persecution because God is with them.

God’s ultimate goal for us is to make us like Christ (1 John 3:2). As we become more and more like him, we discover our true selves, the persons we were created to be. How can we be conformed to Christ’s likeness? By reading and heeding the Word, by studying his life on earth through the Gospels, by being filled with his Spirit, and by doing his work in the world.

Ephes. 4:1-2

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, [2] With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

God has chosen us to be Christ’s representatives on earth. In light of this truth, Paul challenges us to live lives worthy of the calling we have received—the awesome privilege of being called Christ’s very own. This includes being humble, gentle, patient, understanding, and peaceful. People are watching your life. Can they see Christ in you? How well are you doing as his representative?

No one is ever going to be perfect here on earth, so we must accept and love other Christians in spite of their faults. When we see faults in fellow believers, we should be patient and gentle. Is there someone whose actions or personality really annoys you? Rather than dwelling on that person’s weaknesses or looking for faults, pray for him or her. Then do even more—spend time together and see if you can learn to like him or he

2 Tim. 4:2

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

It was important for Timothy to preach the gospel so that the Christian faith could spread throughout the world. We believe in Christ today because people like Timothy were faithful to their mission. It is still vitally important for believers to spread the gospel. Half the people who have ever lived are alive today, and most of them do not know Christ. He is coming soon, and he wants to find his faithful believers ready for him. It may be inconvenient to take a stand for Christ or to tell others about his love, but preaching the Word of God is the most important responsibility the church and its members have been given. Be prepared for, courageous in, and sensitive to God-given opportunities to tell the Good News.

“Be prepared in season and out of season” means to always be ready to serve God in any situation, whether or not it is convenient. Be sensitive to the opportunities God gives you.

Paul told Timothy to “correct, rebuke and encourage.” It is difficult to accept correction, to be told we have to change. But no matter how much the truth hurts, we must be willing to listen to it so we can more fully obey God.

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

God may have seemed slow to these believers as they faced persecution every day and longed to be delivered. But God is not slow; he just is not on *our* timetable (Psalm 90:4). Jesus is waiting so that more sinners will repent and turn to him. We must not sit and wait for Christ to return, but we should live with the realization that time is short and that we have important work to do. Be ready to meet Christ any time, even today; yet plan your course of service as though he may not return for many years.

John 3:15

That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

When the Israelites were wandering in the desert, God sent a plague of snakes to punish the people for their rebellious attitudes. Those doomed to die from snakebite could be healed by obeying God’s command to look up at the elevated bronze snake and by believing that God would heal them if they did (see Numbers

21:8-9). Similarly, our salvation happens when we look up to Jesus, believing he will save us. God has provided this way for us to be healed of sin's deadly bite.

Chapter 9

The Fruits of the Spirit Brings Blessings

Galatians 5:22-25

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, [23] Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. [24] And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. [25] If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Faith

John 15:1-8

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. [2] Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. [3] Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. [4] Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. [5] I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. [6] If a man abides not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. [7] If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. [8] Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

Faith is a gift and also a manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit. The gift of faith is imparted from God through the Word, but the Holy Spirit produces the fruit of faith.

The gift of faith can move mountains, but the fruit of faith is what is required for daily living. The fruit of faith enables us to walk and live by faith (Romans 5:2). Without this kind of faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

From the 1828 Webster's Dictionary, faithfulness means a "firm adherence to the truth and to the duties of relationship with God; adhering to your duties; loyalty; constant in performance of duties or services."

Being faithful is not always easy; it requires making a decision and then sticking to

it no matter what regardless of what are feelings tell us. However, when we are faithful and do what God tells us to do, we will be rewarded; for the Bible says that if we're faithful over little things, God will make us rulers of much.

The fruit of faith knows without doubt, that the shed blood of Jesus Christ saves you. This faith will manifest love to see others saved. Without the love to see others saved, we stand before God with no fruit, and no eternal reward.

Hebrews 11:20

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

Isaac was the son who had been promised to Abraham and Sarah in their old age. It was through Isaac that God fulfilled his promise to eventually give Abraham countless descendants. Isaac had twin sons, Jacob and Esau. God chose the younger son, Jacob, through whom to continue the fulfillment of his promise to Abraham. For more information on Isaac, see his Profile.

Matthew 21:22

And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

Many have wondered about Jesus' statement that if we have faith and don't doubt, we can move mountains. Jesus, of course, was not suggesting that his followers use prayer as "magic" and perform capricious "mountain-moving" acts. Instead, he was making a strong point about the disciples' (and our) lack of faith. What kinds of mountains do you face? How strong is your faith?

Mark 9:23

Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.

Jesus' words do not mean that we can automatically obtain anything we want if we just think positively. Jesus meant that anything is *possible* if we believe, because nothing is too difficult for God.

We cannot have everything we pray for as if by magic; but with faith, we can have everything we need to serve him.

Mark 11:22-24

And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. [23] For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. [24] Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

The kind of prayer that moves mountains is prayer for the fruitfulness of God's kingdom. It would seem impossible to move a mountain into the sea, so Jesus used that picture to say that God can do anything. God will answer your prayers, but not as a result of your positive mental attitude. Other conditions must be met: (1) you must be a believer; (2) you must not hold a grudge against another person; (3) you must not pray with selfish motives; (4) your request must be for the good of God's kingdom. To pray effectively, you need faith in God, not faith in the object of your request. If you focus only on your request, you will be left with nothing if your request is refused.

Jesus, our example for prayer, prayed, "Everything is possible for you. . . Yet not what I will, but what you will" (Mark 14:36). Our prayers are often motivated by our own interests and desires. We like to hear that we can have anything. But Jesus prayed with *God's* interests in mind. When we pray, we should express our desires, but want his will above ours. Check yourself to see if your prayers focus on your interests or God's.

Romans 4:20-21

He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; [21] And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

In these verses we see two functions of God's law. First, it shows us where we go wrong. Because of the law, we know that we are helpless sinners and that we must come to Jesus Christ for mercy.

Second, the moral code revealed in the law can serve to guide our actions by holding up God's moral standards. We do not earn salvation by keeping the law (no one except Christ ever kept or could keep God's law perfectly), but we do please God when our lives conform to his revealed will for us.

Romans 10:17

So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing comes by the word of God.

We must take God's great message of salvation to others so that they can respond to the Good News

After studying the passage of Scripture quoted above, what three steps does man take in order to receive salvation? **(1. Confess, 2. Believe, 3. Accept)** To whom is this salvation available, according to verse 13? **(Whosoever)** According to verse 17, where does faith come from? **(By hearing the Word of God)** (Kenneth Hagin)

Many Jews who looked for the Messiah refused to believe in him when he came. God offered his salvation to the Gentiles ("those who are not a nation" and "a nation that has no understanding"); thus many Gentiles who didn't even know about a Messiah found and believed in him. Some religious people are spiritually blind.

Ephes. 6:16

Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

In the Christian life we battle against rulers and authorities (the powerful evil forces of fallen angels headed by Satan, who is a vicious fighter, see 1 Peter 5:8). To withstand their attacks, we must depend on God's strength and use every piece of his armor. Paul is not only giving this counsel to the church, the body of Christ, but to all individuals within the church. The whole body needs to be armed. As you do battle against "the powers of this dark world," fight in the strength of the church, whose power comes from the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 11:6

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Believing that God exists is only the beginning; even the demons believe that much (James 2:19-20). God will not settle for mere acknowledgment of his existence. He wants a personal, dynamic relationship with you that will transform your life. Those who seek God will find that they are rewarded with his intimate presence.

Sometimes we wonder about the fate of those who haven't heard of Christ and have not even had a Bible to read. God assures us that all who honestly seek him—who act in faith on the knowledge of God that they possess—will be rewarded. When you tell others the gospel, encourage them to be honest and diligent in their

search for truth. Those who hear the gospel are responsible for what they have heard (see 2 Cor. 6:1-2).

Chapter 10

The Fruits of the Spirit Brings Blessings

Galatians 5:22-25

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, [23] Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. [24] And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. [25] If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Love

Bible verses on love offer the Christian reader an insight into the emotion of love and its value. Segments of text could include such things as friendship, love, self-control and marriage. These verses dedicated to love inspire, comfort and inspire the thoughtful reader.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

The entire gospel comes to a focus in this verse. God's love is not static or self-centered; it reaches out and draws others in. Here God sets the pattern of true love, the basis for all love relationships—when you love someone dearly, you are willing to give freely to the point of self-sacrifice. God paid dearly with the life of his Son, the highest price he could pay. Jesus accepted our punishment, paid the price for our sins, and then offered us the new life that he had bought for us. When we share the gospel with others, our love must be like Jesus'—willingly giving up our own comfort and security so that others might join us in receiving God's love.

Matthew 6:24

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Jesus says we can have only one master. We live in a materialistic society where many people serve money. They spend all their lives collecting and storing it, only to die and leave it behind. Their desire for money and what it can buy far outweighs their commitment to God and spiritual matters. Whatever you store up, you will spend much of your time and energy thinking about. Don't fall into the materialistic trap, because "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). Can you honestly say that God, and not money, is your master? One test is to ask which one occupies more of your thoughts, time, and efforts.

1 Cor. 13:12-13

[12] For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face-to-face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. [13] And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

In morally corrupt Corinth, love had become a mixed-up term with little meaning. Today people are still confused about love. Love is the greatest of all human qualities, and it is an attribute of God himself (1 John 4:8). Love involves unselfish service to others; to show it gives evidence that you care. *Faith* is the foundation and content of God's message; hope is the attitude and focus; *love* is the action. When faith and hope are in line, you are free to love completely because you understand how God loves.

Mark 12:30-31

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. [31] And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

God's laws are not burdensome. They can be reduced to two simple principles: love God and love others. These commands are from the Old Testament (Deut. 6:5; Leviticus 19:18).

When you love God completely and care for others as you care for yourself, then you have fulfilled the intent of the Ten Commandments and the other Old Testament laws. According to Jesus, these two commandments summarize all God's laws. Let them rule your thoughts, decisions, and actions. When you are uncertain about what to do, ask yourself which course of action best demonstrates love for God and love for others.

Luke 6:35

But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.

Love means action. One way to put love to work is to take the initiative in meeting specific needs. This is easy to do with people who love us, people whom we trust; but love means doing this even to those who dislike us or plan to hurt us. The money we give others should be considered a gift, not a high-interest loan that will help us more than them. Give as though you are giving to God.

Romans 12:9

Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

Most of us have learned how to pretend to love others—how to speak kindly, avoid hurting their feelings, and appear to take an interest in them. We may even be skilled in pretending to feel moved with compassion when we hear of others' needs, or to become indignant when we learn of injustice. But God calls us to real and sincere love that goes far beyond pretense and politeness. Sincere love requires concentration and effort. It means helping others become better people. It demands our time, money, and personal involvement. No individual has the capacity to express love to a whole community, but the body of Christ in your town does. Look for people who need your love, and look for ways you and your fellow believers can love your community for Christ.

Ephes. 4:2

With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

God has chosen us to be Christ's representatives on earth. In light of this truth, Paul challenges us to live lives worthy of the calling we have received—the awesome privilege of being called Christ's very own. This includes being humble, gentle, patient, understanding, and peaceful. People are watching your life.

1 John 4:7

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

All believers in Christ belong to one body; all are united under one head, Christ himself (see 1 Cor. 12:12-26). Each believer has God-given abilities that can strengthen the whole body. Your special ability may seem small or large, but it is yours to use in God's service. Ask God to use your unique gifts to contribute to the strength and health of the body of believers.

1 John 4:18-19

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. [19] We love him, because he first loved us.

People should be able to see a difference between Christians and non-Christians because of the way Christians live. We are to live as children of light (Ephes. 5:8). Paul told the Ephesians to leave behind the old life of sin, since they were followers of Christ. Living the Christian life is a process. Although we have a new nature, we don't automatically think all good thoughts and express all right attitudes when we become new people in Christ. But if we keep listening to God, we will be changing all the time.

Matthew 6:24

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Jesus says we can have only one master. We live in a materialistic society where many people serve money. They spend all their lives collecting and storing it, only to die and leave it behind. Their desire for money and what it can buy far outweighs their commitment to God and spiritual matters. Whatever you store up, you will spend much of your time and energy thinking about. Don't fall into the materialistic trap, because "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). Can you honestly say that God, and not money, is your master? One test is to ask which one occupies more of your thoughts, time, and efforts.

Jesus contrasted heavenly values with earthly values when he explained that our first loyalty should be to those things that do not fade, cannot be stolen or used up, and never wear out. We should not be fascinated with our possessions, lest *they* possess *us*. This means we may have to do some cutting back if our possessions are

becoming too important to us. Jesus is calling for a decision that allows us to live contentedly with whatever we have because we have chosen what is eternal and lasting.

GOD DOES NOT DELIGHT IN DEATH!

“He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it.”

Isaiah 25:8

When the Lord speaks, he does what he says. It is comforting to know that God’s plans and activities are closely tied to his word. When we pray according to God’s will (as expressed in the Bible) and claim his promises (as recorded in the Bible), he hears us and answers our requests.

Part of this verse is quoted in 1 Cor. 15:54 to describe Christ’s victory over death. God’s ultimate victory is seen when death, our ultimate enemy, is defeated (see also Hosea 13:14). Another part of this verse is quoted in Rev. 21:4, which describes the glorious scene of God’s presence with his people.

A Demonstration of God’s Love for the Wicked

Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live:

turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”

Ezekiel 33:10,11

The exiles were discouraged by their past sins. This is an important turning point in this book—elsewhere in Ezekiel the people had refused to face their sins. Here, they felt heavy guilt for rebelling against God for so many years. Therefore, God assured them of forgiveness if they repented. God *wants* everyone to turn to him. He looks at what we are and will become, not what we have been. God gives you the opportunity to turn to him, if you will take it. Sincerely follow God, and ask him to forgive you when you fail.

“I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.” Deuteronomy 30:19

Moses challenged Israel to choose life, to obey God, and therefore continue to experience his blessings. God doesn't force his will on anyone. He lets us decide whether to follow him or reject him. This decision, however, is a life-or-death matter. God wants us to realize this, for he would like us all to choose life. Daily, in each new situation, we must affirm and reinforce this commitment.

Chapter 11

The Fruits of the Spirit Brings Blessings

Galatians 5:22-25

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, [23] Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. [24] And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. [25] If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Joy

Psalm 16:11

Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

Psalm 126:3

The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad.

Psalm 4:7

Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.

Two kinds of joy are contrasted here—inward joy that comes from knowing and trusting God and happiness that comes as a result of pleasant circumstances. Inward joy is steady as long as we trust God; happiness is unpredictable. Inward joy defeats discouragement; happiness covers it up. Inward joy is lasting; happiness is temporary.

Romans 15:13

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

Romans 14:17

For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Acts 2:28

Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.

James 1:2

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

James doesn't say *if* you face trials, but *whenever* you face them. He assumes that we will have trials and that it is possible to profit from them. The point is not to pretend to be happy when we face pain, but to have a positive outlook ("consider it pure joy") because of what trials can produce in our lives. James tells us to turn our hardships into times of learning. Tough times can teach us perseverance. For other passages dealing with perseverance (also called patience and steadfastness), see Romans 2:7; Romans 5:3-5; Romans 8:24-25; 2 Cor. 6:3-7; 2 Peter 1:2-9.

Hebrews 12:2

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

This "great cloud of witnesses" is composed of the people described in Hebrews 11. Their faithfulness is a constant encouragement to us. We do not struggle alone, and we are not the first to struggle with the problems we face. Others have run the race and won, and their witness stirs us to run and win also. What an inspiring heritage we have!

Neh. 8:10

Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

The people wept openly when they heard God's laws and realized how far they were from obeying them. But Ezra told them they should be filled with joy because the day was holy. It was time to celebrate and to give gifts to those in need.

Celebration is not to be self-centered. Ezra connected celebration with giving. This gave those in need an opportunity to celebrate as well. Often when we celebrate and give to others (even when we don't feel like it), we are strengthened spiritually

and filled with joy. Enter into celebrations that honor God, and allow him to fill you with his joy.

Psalm 34:1-2

A Psalm of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech; who drove him away, and he departed.

I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. [2] My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad.

God promises great blessings to his people, but many of these blessings require our active participation. He will deliver us from fear (Psalm 34:4), save us out of our troubles (Psalm 34:6), guard and deliver us (Psalm 34:7), show us goodness (Psalm 34:8), supply our needs (Psalm 34:9), listen when we talk to him (Psalm 34:15), and redeem us (Psalm 34:22), but we must do our part. We can appropriate his blessings when we seek him (Psalm 34:4, 10), cry out to him (Psalm 34:6, 17), trust him (Psalm 34:8), fear him (Psalm 34:7, 9), refrain from lying (Psalm 34:13), turn from evil, do good and seek peace (Psalm 34:14), are humble (Psalm 34:18), and serve him (Psalm 34:22).

Isaiah 12:2-3

Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation. [3] Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.

Isaiah 55:12

For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Isaiah 61:10

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.

John 15:11

These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

When things are going well, we feel elated. When hardships come, we sink into depression. But true joy transcends the rolling waves of circumstance. Joy comes from a consistent relationship with Jesus Christ. When our lives are intertwined with his, he will help us walk through adversity without sinking into debilitating lows and manage prosperity without moving into deceptive highs. The joy of living with Jesus Christ daily will keep us levelheaded, no matter how high or low our circumstances.

Philip. 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.

It seems strange that a man in prison would be telling a church to rejoice. But Paul's attitude teaches us an important lesson: our inner attitudes do not have to reflect our outward circumstances. Paul was full of joy because he knew that no matter what happened to him, Jesus Christ was with him. Several times in this letter, Paul urged the Philippians to be joyful, probably because they needed to hear this. It's easy to get discouraged about unpleasant circumstances or to take unimportant events too seriously. If you haven't been joyful lately, you may not be looking at life from the right perspective.

Ultimate joy comes from Christ dwelling within us. Christ is near, and at his second coming we will fully realize this ultimate joy. He who lives within us will fulfill his final purposes for us.

Barney E. Warren sums up the fruit of joy in this old hymn in 1900.

Joy Unspeakable

I have found His grace is all complete,
He supplieth every need;
While I sit and learn at Jesus' feet,
I am free, yes, free indeed.

- **Refrain:**

It is joy unspeakable and full of glory,
Full of glory, full of glory;
It is joy unspeakable and full of glory,
Oh, the half has never yet been told.

- I have found the pleasure I once craved,
It is joy and peace within;
What a wondrous blessing, I am saved
From the awful gulf of sin.
- I have found that hope so bright and clear,
Living in the realm of grace;
Oh, the Savior's presence is so near,
I can see His smiling face.
- I have found the joy no tongue can tell,
How its waves of glory roll;
It is like a great o'erflowing well,
Springing up within my soul.

Chapter 12

The Fruits of the Spirit Brings Blessings

Galatians 5:22-25

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, [23] Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. [24] And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. [25] If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Peace

What Jesus said about peace

Matthew 11:28-30

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. [29] Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. [30] For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

John 14:27

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

John 16:33

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

Things you can do to give you peace:

James 3:18

And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

Philip. 4:6-7

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. [7] And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Prayer will bring peace.

Imagine never being “anxious about anything”! It seems like impossibility. We all have worries on the job, in our homes, at school. But Paul’s advice is to turn our worries into prayers. Do you want to worry less? Then pray more! Whenever you start to worry, stop and pray.

God’s peace is different from the world’s peace (see John 14:27). True peace is not found in positive thinking, in absence of conflict, or in good feelings. It comes from knowing that God is in control. Our citizenship in Christ’s kingdom is sure, our destiny is set, and we can have victory over sin. Let God’s peace guard your heart against anxiety.

Peace comes through service.

Romans 14:17-19

For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. [18] For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. [19] Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

Peace comes through Love.

2 Cor. 13:11

Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

Paul’s closing words—what he wanted the Corinthians to remember about the needs facing their church—are still fitting for the church today. When these qualities are not present, there are problems that must be dealt with.

These traits do not come to a church by glossing over problems, conflicts,

and difficulties. They are not produced by neglect, denial, withdrawal, or bitterness.

They are the by-products of the extremely hard work of solving problems. Just as Paul and the Corinthians had to hammer out difficulties to bring peace, so we must *apply* the principles of God's Word and not just hear them.

Peace comes through trust.

Isaiah 12:2

Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation.

This chapter is a hymn of praise—another graphic description of the people's joy when Jesus Christ comes to reign over the earth. Even now we need to express our gratitude to God—thanking him, praising him, and telling others about him. From the depths of our gratitude, we must praise him. And we should share the Good News with others.

Peace comes through obedience.

1 Peter 1:2

Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.

This verse mentions all three members of the Trinity—God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and God the Holy Spirit. All members of the Trinity work to bring about our salvation. The Father chose us before we chose him (Ephes. 1:4). Jesus Christ the Son died for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:6-10). The Holy Spirit brings us the benefits of salvation and sets us apart (sanctifies us) for God's service (2 Thes. 2:13).

Peace comes through faith.

Romans 5:1

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

We now have peace with God, which may differ from peaceful feelings such as calmness and tranquility. Peace with God means that we have been reconciled with

him. There is no more hostility between us, no sin blocking our relationship with him. Peace with God is possible only because Jesus paid the price for our sins through his death on the cross.

God has called you to peace.

1 Cor. 7:15

But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.

Paul's statements were given to encourage the Christian spouse to try to get along with the unbeliever and make the marriage work. If, however, the unbelieving spouse insisted on leaving, Paul said to let him or her go.

Righteousness is sown in peace.

James 3:18

And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

The blessings of the Lord bring peace.

Numbers 6:25-26

The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: [26] The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

A blessing was one way of asking for God's divine favor to rest upon others. The ancient blessing in these verses helps us understand what a blessing was supposed to do. Its five parts conveyed hope that God would (1) bless and keep them (favor and protect); (2) make his face shine upon them (be pleased); (3) be gracious (merciful and compassionate); (4) turn his face toward them (give his approval); (5) give peace. When you ask God to bless others or yourself, you are asking him to do these five things. The blessing you offer will not only help the one receiving it, it will also demonstrate love, encourage others, and provide a model of caring to others.

Chapter 13

The Fruits of the Spirit Brings Blessings

Galatians 5:22-25

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, [23] Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. [24] And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. [25] If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

The Fruit of Meekness

Psalm 147:6

The Lord lifts up the meek: he casteth the wicked down to the ground.

These last five psalms overflow with praise. Each begins and ends with “Praise the LORD.” They show us where, why, and how to praise God. What does praise do? (1) Praise takes our minds off our problems and shortcomings, and focuses them on God. (2) Praise leads us from individual meditation to corporate worship. (3) Praise causes us to consider and appreciate God’s character. (4) Praise lifts our perspective from the earthly to the heavenly.

Isaiah 29:19

The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

The world described here, under Christ’s rule, will be far different from the one we live in today. There will be no more violence or gloom. Joy, understanding, justice, and praise to God will characterize this new world.

Matthew 5:5

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Jesus began his sermon with words that seem to contradict each other. But God’s way of living usually contradicts the world’s. If you want to live for God you must be ready to say and do what seems strange to the world.

You must be willing to give when others take, to love when others hate, to help when others abuse. By giving up your own rights in order to serve others, you will one day receive everything God has in store for you.

Each beatitude tells how to be blessed. “Blessed” means more than happiness. It implies the fortunate or enviable state of those who are in God’s kingdom. The Beatitudes don’t promise laughter, pleasure, or earthly prosperity. To Jesus, “blessed” means the experience of hope and joy, independent of outward circumstances. To find hope and joy, the deepest form of happiness, follow Jesus no matter what the cost.

Zeph. 2:3

Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger.

There was still time for the people to avert God’s judgment. They simply had to turn from their sins, humble themselves, and obey God. The Old Testament prophets announced news of destruction, but they also offered the only means of escape and protection—turning from sin and walking with God (see also Micah 6:8).

1 Peter 3:3-4

Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; [4] But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.

We should not be obsessed by fashion, but neither should we be so unconcerned that we do not bother to care for ourselves. Hygiene, neatness, and grooming are important, but even more important are a person’s attitude and inner spirit. True beauty begins inside.

Psalm 149:4

For the Lord taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation.

Although the Bible invites us to praise God, we often aren't sure how to go about it. Here, several ways are suggested—in the dance, with the voice, with musical instruments. God enjoys his people, and we should enjoy praising him.

Titus 3:2

Speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men.

As Christians, our first allegiance is to Jesus as Lord, but we must obey our government and its leaders as well. Christians are not above the law. Obeying the civil law is only the beginning of our Christian responsibility; we must do what we can to be good citizens. In a democracy, this means participation and willingness to serve. (See Acts 5:29 and Romans 13:1ff for more on the Christian's attitude toward government.)

James 1:21

Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

James advises us to get rid of all that is wrong in our lives and “humbly accept” the salvation message we have received (“the word planted in you”), because it alone can save us.

Psalms 37:11

But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

Meekness hardly seems the proper weapon to deal with enemies. God's warfare must be carried out with calm faith, humility before God, and hope in his deliverance. Jesus also promises a sure reward for those with humble attitudes (Matthew 5:5).

Hebrews 10:36

For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.

Hebrews encourages believers to persevere in their Christian faith and conduct when facing persecution and pressure. We don't usually think of suffering as good for us, but it can build our character and our patience. During times of great stress, we may feel God's presence more clearly and find help from Christians we never thought would care. Knowing that Jesus is with us in our suffering and that he will return one day to put an end to all pain helps us grow in our faith and our relationship with him (see Romans 5:3-5).

The writer encourages his readers not to abandon their faith in times of persecution, but to show by their endurance that their faith is real. Faith means resting in what Christ has done for us in the past, but it also means trusting him for what he will do for us in the present and in the future (see Romans 8:12-25; Galatians 3:10-13).

Chapter 14

The Fruits of the Spirit Brings Blessings

Galatians 5:22-25

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, [23] Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. [24] And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. [25] If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Temperance

The Promise of eternal life:

1 Cor. 9:27

But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Winning a race requires purpose and discipline. Paul uses this illustration to explain that the Christian life takes hard work, self-denial, and grueling preparation. As Christians, we are running toward our heavenly reward. The essential disciplines of prayer, Bible study, and worship equip us to run with vigor and stamina. Don't merely observe from the grandstand; don't just turn out to jog a couple of laps each morning. Train diligently—your spiritual progress depends upon it.

When Paul says he might be disqualified, he does not mean that he could lose his salvation, but rather that he could lose his privilege of telling others about Christ. It is easy to tell others how to live and then not to take our own advice. We must be careful to practice what we preach.

The Promise of knowing the will of God:

Romans 12:1-2

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. [2] And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

God has good, pleasing, and perfect plans for his children. He wants us to be transformed people with renewed minds, living to honor and obey him. Because he wants only what is best for us, and because he gave his Son to make our new lives possible, we should joyfully give ourselves as living sacrifices for his service.

Christians are called to “not conform any longer to the pattern of this world,” with its behavior and customs that are usually selfish and often corrupting. Many Christians wisely decide that much worldly behavior is off limits for them. Our refusal to conform to this world’s values, however, must go even deeper than the level of behavior and customs—it must be firmly planted in our minds—“be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” It is possible to avoid most worldly customs and still be proud, covetous, selfish, stubborn, and arrogant. Only when the Holy Spirit renews, reeducates, and redirects our minds are we truly transformed (see Romans 8:5).

The Promise of overcoming the Devil:

1 Peter 5:8

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

Lions attack sick, young, or stragglers; they choose victims who are alone or not alert. Peter warns us to watch out for Satan when we are suffering or being persecuted. Feeling alone, weak, helpless, and cut off from other believers, so focused on our troubles that we forget to watch for danger, we are especially vulnerable to Satan’s attacks. During times of suffering, seek other Christians for support. Keep your eyes on Christ, and resist the devil. Then, says James, “he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

The Promise knowing the spirit of God:

1 John 4:1-2

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. [2] Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God

“Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits” means that we shouldn’t believe everything we hear just because someone says it is a message inspired by God. There are many ways to test teachers to see if their message is truly from the Lord. One is to check to see if their words match what God says in the Bible. Other tests include their commitment to the body of believers (1 John 2:19), their life-style (1 John 3:23-24), and the fruit of their ministry (1 John 4:6). But the most important test of all, says John, is what they believe about Christ. Do they teach that Jesus is fully God and fully man? Our world is filled with voices claiming to speak for God. Give them these tests to see if they are indeed speaking God’s truth.

The Promise of an eternal prize:

1 Cor. 9:25

All athletes practice strict self-control. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. (NLT)

At times we must even give up something good in order to do what God wants. Each person’s special duties determine the discipline and denial that he or she must accept. Without a goal, discipline is nothing but self-punishment. With the goal of pleasing God, our denial seems like nothing compared to the eternal, imperishable reward that will be ours.

The Promise of Safety:

1 Cor. 3:16-17

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? [17] If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

Just as our bodies are the “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:19), the local church or Christian community is God’s temple. Just as the Jews’ temple in

Jerusalem was not to be destroyed, the church is not to be spoiled and ruined by divisions, controversy, or other sins as members come together to worship God.

The Promise of eternal life:

Galatians 6:7-8

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. [8] For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

It would certainly be a surprise if you planted corn and pumpkins came up. It's a natural law to reap what we sow. It's true in other areas too. If you gossip about your friends, you will lose their friendship. Every action has results. If you plant to please your own desires, you'll reap a crop of sorrow and evil. If you plant to please God, you'll reap joy and everlasting life. What kind of seeds are you sowing?

The Promise of the hope of salvation:

1 Thes. 5:3-6

For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. [4] But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. [5] Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. [6] Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.

The Promise of strength:

Philip. 4:13

I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me.

The power we receive in union with Christ is sufficient to do his will and to face the challenges that arise from our commitment to doing it. He does not grant us superhuman ability to accomplish anything we can imagine without regard to his

interests. As we contend for the faith we will face troubles, pressures, and trials. As they come, ask Christ to strengthen you.

The Promise of bearing much fruit:

John 15:1-8

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. [2] Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. [3] Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. [4] Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. [5] I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. [6] If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. [7] If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. [8] Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

The grapevine is a prolific plant; a single vine bears many grapes. In the Old Testament, grapes symbolized Israel's fruitfulness in doing God's work on the earth (Psalm 80:8; Isaiah 5:1-7; Ezekiel 19:10-14). In the Passover meal, the fruit of the vine symbolized God's goodness to his people.

Christ is the vine, and God is the gardener who cares for the branches to make them fruitful. The branches are all those who claim to be followers of Christ. The fruitful branches are true believers who by their living union with Christ produce much fruit. But those who become unproductive—those who turn back from following Christ after making a superficial commitment—will be separated from the vine. Unproductive followers are as good as dead and will be cut off and tossed aside.

Jesus makes a distinction between two kinds of pruning: (1) separating and (2) cutting back branches. Fruitful branches are cut back to promote growth. In other words, God must sometimes discipline us to strengthen our character and faith. But branches that don't bear fruit are cut off at the trunk because not only are they worthless, but they often infect the rest of the tree. People who won't bear fruit for God or who try to block the efforts of God's followers will be cut off from his life-giving power.

Fruit is not limited to soul winning. In this chapter, answered prayer, joy, and love are mentioned as fruit (John 15:7, 11-12). Galatians 5:22-24 and 2 Peter 1:5-8 describe additional fruit: qualities of Christian character.

Remaining in Christ means (1) believing that he is God's Son (1 John 4:15), (2) receiving him as Savior and Lord (John 1:12), (3) doing what God says (1 John 3:24), (4) continuing to believe the gospel (1 John 2:24), and (5) relating in love to the community of believers, Christ's body (John 15:12).

Many people try to be good, honest people who do what is right. But Jesus says that the only way to live a truly good life is to stay close to him, like a branch attached to the vine. Apart from Christ our efforts are unfruitful. Are you receiving the nourishment and life offered by Christ, the vine? If not, you are missing a special gift he has for you.

When a vine bears "much fruit," God is glorified, for daily he sent the sunshine and rain to make the crops grow, and constantly he nurtured each tiny plant and prepared it to blossom. What a moment of glory for the Lord of the harvest when the harvest is brought into the barns, mature and ready for use! He made it all happen! This farming analogy shows how God is glorified when people come into a right relationship with him and begin to "bear much fruit" in their lives.

The Promise of speaking forth utterances:

Acts 2:1-4

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. [2] And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. [3] And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. [4] And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Held 50 days after Passover, Pentecost was also called the Feast of Weeks. It was one of three major annual feasts (Deut. 16:16), a festival of thanksgiving for the harvested crops. Jesus was crucified at Passover time, and he ascended 40 days after his resurrection.

The Holy Spirit came 50 days after the resurrection, ten days after the ascension. Jews of many nations gathered in Jerusalem for this festival. Thus Peter's speech (Acts 2:14ff) was given to an international audience, and it resulted in a worldwide harvest of new believers—the first converts to Christianity.

This was a fulfillment of John the Baptist's words about the Holy Spirit's baptizing with fire (Luke 3:16), and of the prophet Joel's words about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-29).

Why tongues of fire? Tongues symbolize speech and the communication of the gospel. Fire symbolizes God's purifying presence, which burns away the undesirable elements of our lives and sets our hearts aflame to ignite the lives of others. On Mount Sinai, God confirmed the validity of the Old Testament law with fire from heaven (Exodus 19:16-18). At Pentecost, God confirmed the validity of the Holy Spirit's ministry by sending fire. At Mount Sinai, fire had come down on one place; at Pentecost, fire came down on many believers, symbolizing that God's presence is now available to all who believe in him.

God made his presence known to this group of believers in a spectacular way—violent wind, fire, and his Holy Spirit. Would you like God to reveal himself to you in such recognizable ways? He may do so, but be wary of forcing your expectations on God. In 1 Kings 19:10-13, Elijah also needed a message from God. There was a great wind, then an earthquake, and finally a fire. But God's message came in a "gentle whisper." God may use dramatic methods to work in your life—or he may speak in gentle whispers. Wait patiently and always listen.

These people literally spoke in other languages—a miraculous attention-getter for the international crowd gathered in town for the feast. All the nationalities represented recognized their own languages being spoken. But more than miraculous speaking drew people's attention; they saw the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The apostles continued to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit wherever they went.

The Promise of truth revealed:

John 8:32

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Jesus himself is the truth that sets us free (John 8:36). He is the source of truth, the perfect standard of what is right. He frees us from the consequences of sin, from

self-deception, and from deception by Satan. He shows us clearly the way to eternal life with God. Thus Jesus does not give us freedom to do what we want, but freedom to follow God. As we seek to serve God, Jesus' perfect truth frees us to be all that God meant us to be.

The Promise of everlasting life:

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

The entire gospel comes to a focus in this verse. God's love is not static or self-centered; it reaches out and draws others in. Here God sets the pattern of true love, the basis for all love relationships—when you love someone dearly, you are willing to give freely to the point of self-sacrifice. God paid dearly with the life of his Son, the highest price he could pay. Jesus accepted our punishment, paid the price for our sins, and then offered us the new life that he had bought for us. When we share the gospel with others, our love must be like Jesus'—willingly giving up our own comfort and security so that others might join us in receiving God's love.

Some people are repulsed by the idea of eternal life because their lives are miserable. But eternal life is not an extension of a person's miserable, mortal life; eternal life is God's life embodied in Christ given to all believers now as a guarantee that they will live forever. In eternal life there is no death, sickness, enemy, evil, or sin. When we don't know Christ, we make choices as though this life is all we have. In reality, this life is just the introduction to eternity. Receive this new life by faith and begin to evaluate all that happens from an eternal perspective.

To "believe" is more than intellectual agreement that Jesus is God. It means to put our trust and confidence in him that he alone can save us. It is to put Christ in charge of our present plans and eternal destiny. Believing is both trusting his words as reliable, and relying on him for the power to change. If you have never trusted Christ, let this promise of everlasting life be yours—and believe.

Chapter 15

The Fruits of the Spirit Brings Blessings

Galatians 5:22-25

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, [23] Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. [24] And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. [25] If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Goodness

Consider God's goodness:

Psalm 107:1

O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.

These psalms praise God's works, recount the blessings of righteous living, thank God for deliverance, and praise God for his wonderful Word. These psalms remind us that the best sacrifice we can offer to God is a faithful and obedient life.

This psalm speaks of four different types of people in distress and how God rescues them: wanderers (Psalm 107:4-9), prisoners (Psalm 107:10-16), the sick (Psalm 107:17-20), and the storm-tossed (Psalm 107:23-30). No matter how extreme our calamity, God is able to break through to help us. He is loving and kind to those who are distressed.

“Let the redeemed of the LORD say. . .” God has done so much for us, and we have so much for which to thank him (see Psalm 103)

Psalm 119:68

Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes.

Psalm 31:19

Your goodness is so great! You have stored up great blessings for those who honor you. You have done so much for those who come to you for protection, blessing them before the watching world. (NLT)

John 1:16 And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.

Blessings we receive from God's Goodness:

1 Tim. 4:4

For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving:

Jesus and the apostles repeatedly warned against them false teachers (see, for example, Mark 13:21-23; Acts 20:28-31; 2 Thes. 2:1-12; 2 Peter 3:3-7). The danger that Timothy faced in Ephesus seems to have come from certain people in the church who were following some Greek philosophers who taught that the body was evil and that only the soul mattered. The false teachers refused to believe that the God of creation was good, because his very contact with the physical world would have soiled him. Though these Greek-influenced church members honored Jesus, they could not believe he was truly human. Paul knew that their teachings, if left unchecked, would greatly distort Christian truth.

Eccles. 3:11

God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.

God has "set eternity in the hearts of men." This means that we can never be completely satisfied with earthly pleasures and pursuits. Because we are created in God's image, (1) we have a spiritual thirst, (2) we have eternal value, and (3) nothing but the eternal God can truly satisfy us. He has built in us a restless yearning for the kind of perfect world that can only be found in his perfect rule. He has given us a glimpse of the perfection of his creation. But it is only a glimpse; we cannot see into the future or comprehend everything. So we must trust him now and do his work on earth.

Romans 8:28

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

God works in “all things”—not just isolated incidents—for our good. This does not mean that all that happens to us is good. Evil is prevalent in our fallen world, but God is able to turn every circumstance around for our long-range good. Note that God is not working to make us happy, but to fulfill his purpose. Note also that this promise is not for everybody. Only those who love God and are called according to his purpose can claim it. Those who are “called” are those Holy Spirit convinces and enables to receive Christ. Such people have a new perspective, a new mind-set on life. They trust in God, not life’s treasures; they look for their security in heaven, not on earth; they learn to accept, not resent, pain and persecution because God is with them.

Psalm 23:6

Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever.

In ancient Near Eastern culture, at a banquet it was customary to anoint a person with fragrant oil as a lotion. Hosts were also expected to protect their guests at all costs. God offers the protection of a host even when enemies surround us. In the final scene of this psalm, we see that believers will dwell with God. God, the perfect shepherd and host, promises to guide and protect us through life to bring us into his house forever. He brings goodness.

We must produce the fruit of goodness:

John 15:8

Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

Many people try to be good, honest people who do what is right. But Jesus says that the only way to live a truly good life is to stay close to him, like a branch attached to the vine. Apart from Christ our efforts are unfruitful. Are you receiving the nourishment and life offered by Christ, the vine? If not, you are missing a special gift he has for you.

When a vine bears “much fruit,” God is glorified, for daily he sent the sunshine and rain to make the crops grow, and constantly he nurtured each tiny plant and prepared it to blossom. What a moment of glory for the Lord of the harvest when

the harvest is brought into the barns, mature and ready for use! He made it all happen! This farming analogy shows how God is glorified when people come into a right relationship with him and begin to “bear much fruit” in their lives.

James 1:22

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

It is important to listen to what God’s Word says, but it is much more important to obey it, to *do* what it says. We can measure the effectiveness of our Bible study time by the effect it has on our behavior and attitudes.

Acts 10:36

The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)

In every nation there are hearts restless for God, ready to receive the gospel—but someone must take it to them. Seeking God is not enough—people must find him. How then shall seekers find God without someone to point the way? Is God asking you to show someone the way to him? (See Romans 10:14-15.)

2 Cor. 10:4-5

(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) [5] Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

We, like Paul, are merely weak humans, but we don’t need to use human plans and methods to win our battles. God’s mighty weapons are available to us as we fight against Satan’s “strongholds.” The Christian must choose whose methods to use, God’s or the world’s. Paul assures us that God’s mighty weapons—prayer, faith, hope, love, God’s Word, the Holy Spirit—are powerful and effective (see Ephes. 6:13-18)! These weapons can break down the proud human arguments against God and the walls that Satan builds to keep people from finding God. When dealing with the pride that keeps people from a relationship with Christ, we may be tempted to use our own methods. But nothing can break down these barriers like God’s weapons.

Paul uses military terminology to describe this warfare against sin and Satan. God must be the commander in chief—even our thoughts must be submitted to his control as we live for him.

Galatians 6:9-10

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. [10] As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

It is discouraging to continue to do right and receive no word of thanks or see no tangible results. But Paul challenged the Galatians and he challenges us to keep on doing good, and to trust God for the results. In due time, we will reap a harvest of blessing.

God is good and He takes delight in doing good things for people. He does indeed hold our hand in times of trouble and helps us stand against the onslaught of life's difficulties. But I wonder if you've ever asked yourself, why is He good? It certainly is not because we deserve it or because He feels the need to buy our love and allegiance with His benefits.

As endless as God's blessings are, so should our praises be

God is good—make sure the people in your world know what He has done in your life.

Chapter 16

The Blessings of Obedience

Exodus 15:26

And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the Lord that healeth thee.

God promised that if the people obeyed him they would be free from the diseases that plagued the Egyptians. Little did they know that many of the moral laws he later gave them were designed to keep them free from sickness. For example, following God's law against prostitution would keep them free of venereal disease. God's laws for us are often designed to keep us from harm. Men and women are complex beings. Our physical, emotional, and spiritual lives are intertwined. Modern medicine is now acknowledging what these laws assumed. If we want God to care for us, we need to submit to his directions for living.

Exodus 23:22

But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries.

Deut. 5:29

O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!

God told Moses that he wanted the people to incline their hearts to fear him—to *want* to respect and obey him. There is a difference between doing something because it is required and doing something because we want to. God is not interested in forced religious exercises and rule-keeping. He wants our hearts and lives completely dedicated to him. If we love him, obedience will follow.

Deut. 11:26-28

Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; [27] A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day: [28] And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known.

What is God's curse? It is not a magician's spell. To understand it, we must remember the conditions of the covenant between God and Israel. Both parties had agreed to the terms. The blessings would benefit Israel if they kept their part of the covenant: They would receive the land, live there forever, have fruitful crops, and expel their enemies. The curse would fall on Israel only if they broke their agreement; then they would forfeit God's blessing and would be in danger of crop failure, invasion, and expulsion from their land. Joshua later reviewed these blessings and curses with the entire nation (Joshua 8:34).

It is amazing that God set before the Israelites a choice between blessings and curses. It is even more amazing that most of them, through their disobedience, chose the curses. We have the same fundamental choice today. We can live for ourselves or live in service to God. To choose our own way is to travel on a dead-end road, but to choose God's way is to receive eternal life (John 5:24). If they had followed in obedience, they would have been blessed.

1 Samuel 15:22

And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

This is the first of numerous places in the Bible where the theme "to obey is better than sacrifice" is stated (Psalm 40:6-8; Psalm 51:16-17; Proverbs 21:3; Isaiah 1:11-17; Jeremiah 7:21-23; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8; Matthew 12:7; Mark 12:33; Hebrews 10:8-9). Was Samuel saying that sacrifice is unimportant? No, he was urging Saul to look at his reasons for making the sacrifice rather than at the sacrifice itself. A sacrifice was a ritual transaction between man and God that physically demonstrated a relationship between them. But if the person's heart was not truly repentant or if he did not truly love God, the sacrifice was a hollow ritual. Religious ceremonies or rituals are empty unless they are performed with an attitude of love and obedience. "Being religious" (going to church, serving on a committee, giving to charity) is not enough if we do not act out of devotion and obedience to God.

Rebellion and arrogance are serious sins. They involve far more than being independent and strong-minded. Scripture equates them with divination (witchcraft) and idolatry, sins worthy of death (Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 20:6; Deut. 13:12-15; Deut. 18:10; Micah 5:10-14).

Saul became both rebellious and arrogant, so it is little wonder that God finally rejected him and took away his kingdom. Rebellion against God is perhaps the

most serious sin of all because as long as a person rebels, he or she closes the door to forgiveness and restoration with God.

John 14:15-18

If ye love me, keep my commandments. [16] And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; [17] Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it sees him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. [18] I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

Jesus was soon going to leave the disciples, but he would remain with them. How could this be? The Counselor—the Spirit of God himself—would come after Jesus was gone to care for and guide the disciples. The regenerating power of the Spirit came on the disciples just before Jesus’ ascension (John 20:22), and the Spirit was poured out on all the believers at Pentecost (Acts 2), shortly after Jesus ascended to heaven. The Holy Spirit is the very presence of God within all believers, helping us live as God wants and building Christ’s church on earth and us. By faith we can appropriate the Spirit’s power each day.

When Jesus said, “I will come to you,” he meant it. Although Jesus ascended to heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit to live in believers, and to have the Holy Spirit is to have Jesus himself.

John 15:7-14

If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. [8] Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. [9] As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. [10] If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. [11] These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. [12] This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. [13] Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. [14] Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

Those who obey remain in Christ love.

Examples of those who followed God in obedience:

Through obedience, Noah saved himself and his family during the flood.

Genesis 6:22

Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he.

Noah got right to work when God told him to build the ark. Other people must have been warned about the coming disaster (1 Peter 3:20), but apparently they did not expect it to happen. Today things haven't changed much. Each day thousands of people are warned of God's inevitable judgment, yet most of them don't really believe it will happen. Don't expect people to welcome or accept your message of God's coming judgment on sin. Those who don't believe in God will deny his judgment and try to get you to deny God as well. But remember God's promise to Noah to keep him safe. This can inspire you to trust God for deliverance in the judgment that is sure to come.

Through obedience, Abraham became the father of a great nation.

Hebrews 11:8

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

Abraham's life was filled with faith. At God's command, he left home and went to another land—obeying without question (Genesis 12:1ff). He believed the covenant that God made with him (Genesis 12:2-3; Genesis 13:14-16; Genesis 15:1-6).

In obedience to God, Abraham was even willing to sacrifice his son Isaac (Genesis 22:1-19). Do not be surprised if God asks you to give up secure, familiar surroundings in order to carry out his will. For further information on Abraham, see his Profile.

Through obedience, Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt.

Exodus 3:7-8

And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; [8] And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land

flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

At God's command, Moses removed his sandals and covered his face. Taking off his shoes was an act of reverence, conveying his own unworthiness before God. God is our friend, but he is also our sovereign Lord. To approach him frivolously shows a lack of respect and sincerity. When you come to God in worship, do you approach him casually, or do you come as though you were an invited guest before a king? If necessary, adjust your attitude so it is suitable for approaching a holy God.

Moses made excuses because he felt inadequate for the job God asked him to do. It was natural for him to feel that way. He *was* inadequate all by himself. But God wasn't asking Moses to work alone. He offered other resources to help (God himself, Aaron, and the ability to do miracles). God often calls us to tasks that seem too difficult, but he doesn't ask us to do them alone. God offers us his resources, just as he did to Moses. We should not hide behind our inadequacies, as Moses did, but look beyond ourselves to the great resources available. Then we can allow God to use our unique contributions.

Through obedience, Joshua won the battle of Jericho by God's strategy.

Joshua 1:16

And they answered Joshua, saying, All that thou commandest us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us, we will go.

Through obedience, David refused to harm Saul.

1 Samuel 13:14

But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee.

It is difficult to trust God when you feel your resources slipping away. When Saul felt that time was running out, he became impatient with God's timing. In thinking that the ritual was all he needed, he substituted the ritual for faith in God.

When faced with a difficult decision, don't allow impatience to drive you to disobey God. When you know what God wants, follow his plan regardless of the consequences. God often uses delays to test our obedience and patience.

Saul had plenty of excuses for his disobedience. But Samuel zeroed in on the real issue: “You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you.” Like Saul, we often gloss over our mistakes and sins, trying to justify and spiritualize our actions because of our “special” circumstances. Our excuses, however, are nothing more than disobedience. God knows our true motives. He forgives, restores, and blesses only when we are honest about our sins. By trying to hide his sins behind excuses, Saul lost his kingship (1 Samuel 13:14).

Through obedience, Jesus went the cross.

Philip. 2:8

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Jesus Christ was humble, willing to give up his rights in order to obey God and serve people. Like Christ, we should have a servant’s attitude, serving out of love for God and for others, not out of guilt or fear. Remember, you can choose your attitude. You can approach life expecting to be served, or you can look for opportunities to serve others. See Mark 10:

2:5-7 The *incarnation* was the act of the preexistent Son of God voluntarily assuming a human body and human nature.

Without ceasing to be God, he became a human being, the man called Jesus. He did not give up his deity to become human, but he set aside the right to his glory and power. In submission to the Father’s will, Christ limited his power and knowledge. Jesus of Nazareth was subject to place, time, and many other human limitations. What made his humanity unique was his freedom from sin. In his full humanity, Jesus showed us everything about God’s character that can be conveyed in human terms. The incarnation is explained further in these passages: John 1:1-14; Romans 1:2-5; 2 Cor. 8:9; 1 Tim. 3:16; Hebrews 2:14; and 1 John 1:1-3.

These verses are probably from a hymn sung by the early Christian church. The passage holds many parallels to the prophecy of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53. As a hymn, it was not meant to be a complete statement about the nature and work of Christ. Several key characteristics of Jesus Christ, however, are praised in this passage:

- (1) Christ has always existed with God;
- (2) Christ is equal to God because he *is* God (John 1:1ff; Col. 1:15-19);
- (3) though Christ is God, he became a man in order to fulfill God’s plan of salvation for all people;

(4) Christ did not just have the appearance of being a man—he actually became human to identify with our sins;

(5) Christ voluntarily laid aside his divine rights and privileges out of love for his Father;

(6) Christ died on the cross for our sins so we wouldn't have to face eternal death;

(7) God glorified Christ because of his obedience;

(8) God raised Christ to his original position at the Father's right hand, where he will reign forever as our Lord and Judge. How can we do anything less than praise Christ as our Lord and dedicate ourselves to his service!

Often people excuse selfishness, pride, or evil by claiming their rights. They think, "I can cheat on this test; after all, I deserve to pass this class," or "I can spend all this money on myself—I worked hard for it," or "I can get an abortion; I have a right to control my own body." But as believers, we should have a different attitude, one that enables us to lay aside our rights in order to serve others. If we say we follow Christ, we must also say we want to live as he lived. We should develop his attitude of humility as we serve, even when we are not likely to get recognition for our efforts. Are you selfishly clinging to your rights, or are you willing to serve?

Death on a cross (crucifixion) was the form of capital punishment that Romans used for notorious criminals. It was excruciatingly painful and humiliating. Prisoners were nailed or tied to a cross and left to die. Death might not come for several days, and it usually came by suffocation when the weight of the weakened body made breathing more and more difficult. Jesus died as one who was cursed (Galatians 3:13). How amazing that the perfect man should die this most shameful death so that we would not have to face eternal punishment!

At the last judgment even those who are condemned will recognize Jesus' authority and right to rule. People can choose to regard Jesus as Lord now as a step of willing and loving commitment, or be forced to acknowledge him as Lord when he returns. Christ may return at any moment. Are you prepared to meet him?

Chapter 17

The Blessings of Favor

Psalm 5:12

For thou, Lord, will bless the righteous; with favor wilt thou compass him as with a shield.

The Psalmist became aware of the value of the favor of God. He knew that doing the will of God would enhance favor from God.

Psalm 23:5-6

Thou prepares a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anoints my head with oil; my cup rennet over. [6] Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

In ancient Near Eastern culture, at a banquet it was customary to anoint a person with fragrant oil as a lotion. Hosts were also expected to protect their guests at all costs. God offers the protection of a host even when enemies surround us. In the final scene of this psalm, we see that believers will dwell with God. God, the perfect shepherd and host, promises to guide and protect us through life to bring us into his house forever.

Numbers 6:25-26

The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: [26] The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

A blessing was one way of asking for God's divine favor to rest upon others. The ancient blessing in these verses helps us understand what a blessing was supposed to do. Its five parts conveyed hope that God would (1) bless and keep them (favor and protect); (2) make his face shine upon them (be pleased); (3) be gracious (merciful and compassionate); (4) turn his face toward them (give his approval); (5) give peace. When you ask God to bless others or yourself, you are asking him to do these five things. The blessing you offer will not only help the one receiving it, it will also demonstrate love, encourage others, and provide a model of caring to others.

Genesis 39:3-4

And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand. [4] And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand.

In every position in which Joseph found himself, he was faithful to do his best. In each positing, he found favor.

Psalms 103:4-5

Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; [5] Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.

David's praise focused on God's glorious deeds. It is easy to complain about life, but David's list gives us plenty for which to praise God—he forgives our sins, heals our diseases, redeems us from death, crowns us with love and compassion, satisfies our desires, and gives righteousness and justice. We receive all of these without deserving any of them. No matter how difficult your life's journey, you can always count your blessings—past, present, and future. When you feel as though you have nothing for which to praise God, read David's list.

Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

A leader who stirs us to move ahead, someone who believes we can do the task he has given and who will be with us all the way, encourages us all. God is that kind of leader. He knows the future, and his plans for us are good and full of hope. As long as God, who knows the future, provides our agenda and goes with us as we fulfill his mission, we can have boundless hope. This does not mean that we will be spared pain, suffering, or hardship, but that God will see us through to a glorious conclusion.

John 17:22-23

And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: [23] I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

Jesus' great desire for his disciples was that they would become one. He wanted them unified as a powerful witness to the reality of God's love. Are you helping to unify the body of Christ, the church? You can pray for other Christians, avoid gossip, build others up, work together in humility, give your time and money, exalt Christ, and refuse to get sidetracked arguing over divisive matters.

Jesus prayed for unity among the believers based on the believers' unity with him and the Father. Christians can know unity among themselves if they are living in union with God. For example, each branch living in union with the vine is united with all other branches doing the same.

Acts 2:46-47

And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, [47] Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

A common misconception about the first Christians (who were Jews) was that they rejected the Jewish religion. But these believers saw Jesus' message and resurrection as the fulfillment of everything they knew and believed from the Old Testament. The Jewish believers at first did not separate from the rest of the Jewish community. They still went to the temple and synagogues for worship and instruction in the Scriptures. But their belief in Jesus created great friction with Jews who didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah. Thus, believing Jews were forced to meet in private homes for communion, prayer, and teaching about Christ. By the end of the first century, many of these Jewish believers were excommunicated from their synagogues.

A healthy Christian community attracts people to Christ. The Jerusalem church's zeal for worship and brotherly love was contagious. A healthy, loving church will grow in numbers.

Jeremiah 33:3

Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.

God assured Jeremiah that he had only to call to God and God would answer (see also Psalm 145:18; Isaiah 58:9; Matthew 7:7). God is ready to answer our prayers, but we must ask for his assistance. Surely God could take care of our needs without our asking. But when we ask, we are acknowledging that he alone is God

and that we cannot accomplish in our own strength all that is his domain to do. When we ask, we must humble ourselves, lay aside our willfulness and worry, and determine to obey him.

2 Cor. 8:9

For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

There is no evidence that Jesus was any poorer than most first-century Palestinians; rather, Jesus became poor by giving up his rights as God and becoming human. In his incarnation God voluntarily became man—the wholly human person, Jesus of Nazareth. As a man, Jesus was subject to place, time, and other human limitations. He did not give up his eternal power when he became human, but he did set aside his glory and his rights (see the note on +Phil. 2:5-7). In response to the Father’s will, he limited his power and knowledge. Christ became “poor” when he became human, because he set aside so much. Yet by doing so, he made us “rich” because we received salvation and eternal life.

What made Jesus’ humanity unique was his freedom from sin. In his full humanity, we can see everything about God’s character that can be conveyed in human terms. The incarnation is explained further in these Bible passages: John 1:1-14; Romans 1:2-5; Phil. 2:6-11; 1 Tim. 3:16; Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 1:1-3.

2 Cor. 9:8

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:

People may hesitate to give generously to God if they worry about having enough money left over to meet their own needs. Paul assured the Corinthians that God was able to meet their needs. The person who gives only a little will receive only a little in return. Don’t let a lack of faith keep you from giving freely and generously.

Ephes. 1:3

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

“Who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing” means that in Christ we have all the benefits of knowing God—being chosen for salvation, being adopted as his children, forgiveness, insight, the gifts of the Spirit,

power to do God's will, the hope of living forever with Christ. Because we have an intimate relationship with Christ, we can enjoy these blessings now. The *heavenly realms* means that these blessings are eternal, not temporal. The blessings come from Christ's spiritual realm, not the earthly realm of the goddess Artemis. Other references to the heavenly realms in this letter include Ephes. 1:20; Ephes. 2:6; Ephes. 3:10. Such passages reveal Christ in his victorious, exalted role as ruler of all.

Ephes. 1:7-8

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; [8] Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;

To speak of Jesus' blood was an important first-century way of speaking of Christ's death. His death points to two wonderful truths—redemption and forgiveness. *Redemption* was the price paid to gain freedom for a slave (Leviticus 25:47-54). Through his death, Jesus paid the price to release us from slavery to sin. *Forgiveness* was granted in Old Testament times on the basis of the shedding of animals' blood (Leviticus 17:11). Now we are forgiven on the basis of the shedding of Jesus' blood—he died as the perfect and final sacrifice. (See also Romans 5:9; Ephes. 2:13; Col. 1:20; Hebrews 9:22; 1 Peter 1:19.)

Grace is God's voluntary and loving favor given to those he saves. We can't earn salvation, nor do we deserve it. No religious, intellectual, or moral effort can gain it, because it comes only from God's mercy and love. Without God's grace, no person can be saved. To receive it, we must acknowledge that we cannot save ourselves, that only God can save us, and that our only way to receive this loving favor is through faith in Christ.

1 Tim. 1:14

And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

People can feel so guilt-ridden by their past that they think God could never forgive and accept them. But consider Paul's past. He had scoffed at the teachings of Jesus ("a blasphemer") and hunted down and murdered God's people ("a

persecutor and a violent man”) before coming to faith in Christ (Acts 9:1-9). God forgave Paul and used Paul mightily for his kingdom. No matter how shameful your past, God also can forgive and use you.

We may feel that our faith in God and our love for Christ and for others is inadequate. But we can be confident that Christ will help our faith and love grow as our relationship with him deepens.

Hebrews 4:16

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Prayer is our approach to God, and we are to come “with confidence.” Some Christians approach God meekly with heads hung low, afraid to ask him to meet their needs. Others pray flippantly, giving little thought to what they say. Come with reverence because he is your King. But also come with bold assurance because he is your Friend and Counselor.

Titus 3:4-7

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, [5] Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; [6] Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; [7] That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Prayer is our approach to God, and we are to come “with confidence.” Some Christians approach God meekly with heads hung low, afraid to ask him to meet their needs. Others pray flippantly, giving little thought to what they say. Come with reverence because he is your King. But also come with bold assurance because he is your Friend and Counselor.

2 Peter 1:2-3

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, [3] According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

The term new birth refers to spiritual birth (regeneration)—the Holy Spirit’s act of bringing believers into God’s family. Jesus used this concept of new birth when he explained salvation to Nicodemus (see John 3).

Chapter 18

The Blessings of God's Protection

Psalms 91 is a chapter that is good to follow and memorize to claim Divine Protection against the possibility of happenings that may come today.

Psalm 91:1-16

Those who live in the shelter of the Most High
will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

[2] This I declare of the Lord:

He alone is my refuge, my place of safety;
he is my God, and I am trusting him.

[3] For he will rescue you from every trap
and protect you from the fatal plague.

[4] He will shield you with his wings.

He will shelter you with his feathers.

His faithful promises are your armor and protection.

[5] Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night,
nor fear the dangers of the day,

[6] nor dread the plague that stalks in darkness,
nor the disaster that strikes at midday.

[7] Though a thousand fall at your side,
though ten thousand are dying around you,
these evils will not touch you.

[8] But you will see it with your eyes;
you will see how the wicked are punished.

[9] If you make the Lord your refuge,
if you make the Most High your shelter,

[10] no evil will conquer you;
no plague will come near your dwelling.

[11] For he orders his angels
to protect you wherever you go.

[12] They will hold you with their hands
to keep you from striking your foot on a stone.

[13] You will trample down lions and poisonous snakes;
you will crush fierce lions and serpents under your feet!

[14] The Lord says, "I will rescue those who love me.

I will protect those who trust in my name.

[15] When they call on me, I will answer;

I will be with them in trouble.

I will rescue them and honor them.

[16] I will satisfy them with a long life
and give them my salvation." (NLT)

Verses 1-8 shows that those who by faith choose God for his or her protector shall find all in him that he needs or can desire.

Verses 9-16 shows that whatever happens, nothing shall hurt the believer.

God is a shelter, a refuge when we are afraid. The writer's faith in the Almighty God as Protector would carry him through all the dangers and fears of life. This should be a picture of our trust—trading all our fears for faith in him, no matter how intense our fears. To do this we must “dwell” and “rest” with him (Psalm 91:1). By entrusting ourselves to his protection and pledging our daily devotion to him, we will be kept safe.

One of the functions of angels is to watch over believers (Hebrews 1:14). There are examples of guardian angels in Scripture (1 Kings 19:5; Daniel 6:22; Matthew 18:10; Luke 16:22; Acts 12:7), although there is no indication that one angel is assigned to each believer. Angels can also be God's messengers (Matthew 2:13; Acts 27:23-24). Angels are not visible, except on special occasions (Numbers 22:31; Luke 2:9). Psalm 91:11-12 were quoted by Satan when he tempted Jesus (Matthew 4:6; Luke 4:10-11). It is comforting to know that God watches over us even in times of great stress and fear.

Other great Scriptures regarding God's protection:

Psalm 34:7

The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.

Deut. 28:7

"The Lord will conquer your enemies when they attack you. They will attack you from one direction, but they will scatter from you in seven!

Proverbs 18:10

The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.

The Israelites were naturally curious about the occult practices of the Canaanite religions. But Satan is behind the occult, and God flatly forbade Israel to have anything to do with it. Today people are still fascinated by horoscopes, fortune-telling, witchcraft, and bizarre cults. Often their interest comes from a desire to know and control the future. But Satan is no less dangerous today than he was in Moses' time. In the Bible, God tells us all we need to know about what is going to happen. The information Satan offers is likely to be distorted or completely false. With the trustworthy guidance of the Holy Spirit through the Bible and the church, we don't need to turn to occult sources for faulty information.

Psalm 32:7

Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah.

Proverbs 29:25

Fearing people is a dangerous trap, but to trust the Lord means safety.

Fear of people can hamper everything you try to do. In extreme forms, it can make you afraid to leave your home. By contrast, fear of God—respect, reverence, and trust—is liberating. Why fear people who can do no eternal harm? Instead, fear God who can turn the harm intended by others into good for those who trust him

2 Tim. 1:7

For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.

Paul mentions three characteristics of the effective Christian leader: power, love, and self-discipline. These are available to us because the Holy Spirit lives in us. Follow his leading each day so that your life will more fully exhibit these characteristics.

Hebrews 13:5-6

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. [6] So that we

may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

How can we learn to be content? Strive to live with less rather than desiring more; give away out of your abundance rather than accumulating more; relish what you have rather than resent what you're missing. See God's love expressed in what he has provided, and remember that money and possessions will all pass away. (See Phil. 4:11 for more on contentment, and 1 John 2:17 for the futility of earthly desires.)

We become content when we realize God's sufficiency for our needs. Christians who become materialistic are saying by their actions that God can't take care of them—or at least that he won't take care of them the way they want. Insecurity can lead to the love of money, whether we are rich or poor. The only antidote is to trust God to meet all our needs.

Psalm 4:7-8

Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased. [8] I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only make me dwell in safety.

Two kinds of joy are contrasted here—inward joy that comes from knowing and trusting God and happiness that comes as a result of pleasant circumstances. Inward joy is steady as long as we trust God; happiness is unpredictable. Inward joy defeats discouragement; happiness covers it up. Inward joy is lasting; happiness is temporary.

Chapter 19

The Blessings of Health and Healing

John 10:10

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

In contrast to the thief who takes life, Jesus gives life. The life he gives right now is abundantly richer and fuller. It is eternal, yet it begins immediately. Life in Christ is lived on a higher plane because of his overflowing forgiveness, love, and guidance.

Proverbs 4:22

For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh.

Jesus wants you healed and made whole.

Isaiah 53:4-5

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. [5] But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

How could an Old Testament person understand the idea of Christ dying for our sins (our transgressions and iniquities)—actually bearing the punishment that we deserved? The sacrifices suggested this idea, but it is one thing to kill a lamb, and something quite different to think of God's chosen servant as that Lamb. But God was pulling aside the curtain of time to let the people of Isaiah's day look ahead to the suffering of the future Messiah and the resulting forgiveness made available to all mankind.

1 Peter 2:24

Who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

Christ died for our sins, in our place, so we would not have to suffer the punishment we deserve. This is called substitutionary atonement.

Romans 8:32

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

Paul says that Jesus is interceding for us in heaven. God has acquitted us and has removed our sin and guilt, so it is Satan, not God, who accuses us. When he does, Jesus, the advocate for our defense, stands at God's right hand to present our case. For more on the concept of Christ as our advocate, see the notes on +Hebrews 4:14; +Hebrews 4:15.

Matthew 8:2-3

And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. [3] And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Leprosy, like AIDS today, was a terrifying disease because there was no known cure. In Jesus' day, the Greek word for *leprosy* was used for a variety of similar diseases, and some forms were contagious. If a person contracted the contagious type, a priest declared him a leper and banished him from his home and city. The leper was sent to live in a community with other lepers until he either got better or died. Yet when the leper begged Jesus to heal him, Jesus reached out and touched him, even though his skin was covered with the dread disease.

Psalm 107:19-20

Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses. [20] He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.

Psalm 105:37

He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was not one feeble person among their tribes.

3 John 1:2

Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.

John was concerned for Gaius's physical *and* spiritual well-being. This was the opposite of the popular heresy that taught the separation of spirit and matter and despised the physical side of life. Today, many people still fall into this way of thinking. This non-Christian attitude logically leads to one of two responses: neglect of the body and physical health, or indulgence of the body's sinful desires. God is concerned for both your body and your soul. As a responsible Christian, you should neither neglect nor indulge yourself, but care for your physical needs and discipline your body so that you are at your best for God's service.

Exodus 15:26

And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the Lord that healeth thee.

Jeremiah 30:17

For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord; because they called thee an Outcast, saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after.

Proverbs 4:20-22

My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings. [21] Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart. [22] For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh.

Everyone who came to Jesus was healed.

Matthew 4:23

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.

Jesus was teaching, preaching, and healing. These were the three main aspects of his ministry. Teaching shows Jesus' concern for understanding; preaching shows his concern for commitment; and healing shows his concern for wholeness. His miracles of healing authenticated his teaching and preaching, proving that he truly was from God.

Jesus soon developed a powerful preaching ministry and often spoke in the synagogues. Most towns that had ten or more Jewish families had a synagogue. The building served as a religious gathering place on the Sabbath and as a school during the week. The leader of the synagogue was not a preacher as much as an administrator. His job was to find and invite rabbis to teach and preach. It was customary to invite visiting rabbis like Jesus to speak.

Jesus preached the gospel—the Good News—to everyone who wanted to hear it. The gospel is that the kingdom of heaven has come, that God is with us, and that he cares for us. Christ can heal us, not just of physical sickness, but of spiritual sickness as well. There's no sin or problem too great or too small for him to handle. Jesus' words were good news because they offered freedom, hope, peace of heart, and eternal life with God.

Matthew 8:5-7

And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, [6] And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. [7] And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.

The centurion could have let many obstacles stand between him and Jesus—pride, doubt, money, language, distance, time, self-sufficiency, power, race. But he didn't. If he did not let these barriers block his approach to Jesus, we don't need to either.

Matthew 8:16-17

When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: [17] That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.

Matthew continues to show Jesus' kingly nature. Through a single touch, Jesus healed (Matthew 8:3, 15); when he spoke a single word, evil spirits fled his presence (Matthew 8:16). Jesus has authority over all evil powers and all earthly disease. He also has power and authority to conquer sin. Sickness and evil are consequences of living in a fallen world. But in the future, when God removes all sin, there will be no more sickness and death. Jesus' healing miracles were a taste of what the whole world will one day experience in God's kingdom.

Matthew 9:6-7

But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. [7] And he arose, and departed to his house.

It's easy to tell someone his sins are forgiven; it's a lot more difficult to reverse a case of paralysis! Jesus backed up his words by healing the man's legs. Jesus' action showed that his words were true; he had the power to forgive as well as to heal. Talk is cheap, but our words lack meaning if our actions do not back them up. We can say we love God or others, but if we are not taking practical steps to demonstrate that love, our words are empty and meaningless. How well do your actions back up what you say?

Matthew 15:30

And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them:

A great crowd was brought to Jesus to be healed, and he healed them all. Jesus is still able to heal broken lives, and we can be the ones who bring suffering people to him. Who do you know that needs Christ's healing touch? You can bring them to Jesus through prayer or through explaining to them the reason for the hope that you have (1 Peter 3:15). Then let Christ do the healing.

Matthew 20:34

So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.

Matthew records that there were two blind men, while Mark and Luke mention only one. This is probably the same event, but Mark and Luke singled out the more vocal of the two men.

The blind men called Jesus “Son of David” because the Jews knew that the Messiah would be a descendant of David (see Isaiah 9:6-7; Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5-6). These blind beggars could *see* that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, while the religious leaders who witnessed Jesus’ miracles were blind to his identity, refusing to open their eyes to the truth. Seeing with your eyes doesn’t guarantee seeing with your heart.

Although Jesus was concerned about the coming events in Jerusalem, he demonstrated what he had just told the disciples about service (Matthew 20:28) by stopping to care for the blind men.

Hebrews 13:8

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and forever.

Though human leaders have much to offer, we must keep our eyes on Christ, our ultimate leader. Unlike any human leaders, he will never change. Christ has been and will be the same forever. In a changing world we can trust our unchanging Lord.

Chapter 20

The Blessings of Knowing the Word of God

The Word of God gives eternal and abundant life.

Romans 10:17

So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

It is the word of God that sets us free. Many Jews who looked for the Messiah refused to believe in him when he came. God offered his salvation to the Gentiles (“those who are not a nation” and “a nation that has no understanding”); thus many Gentiles who didn’t even know about a Messiah found and believed in him. Some religious people are spiritually blind, while those who have never been in a church are sometimes the most responsive to God’s message. Because appearances are deceiving, and we can’t see into people’s hearts, beware of judging beforehand who will respond to the gospel and who will not.

Knowing the truth is found in the word of God.

John 8:31-32

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; [32] And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

The word of God sets us free and gives us life. Jesus himself is the truth that sets us free (John 8:36). He is the source of truth, the perfect standard of what is right. He frees us from the consequences of sin, from self-deception, and from deception by Satan. He shows us clearly the way to eternal life with God. Thus Jesus does not give us freedom to do what we want, but freedom to follow God. As we seek to serve God, Jesus’ perfect truth frees us to be all that God meant us to be.

The word of God gives us guidance.

Psalms 119:105

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.
To walk safely in the woods at night we need a light so we don’t trip over tree roots or fall into holes. In this life, we walk through a dark forest of evil. But the

Bible can be our light to show us the way ahead so we won't stumble as we walk. It reveals the entangling roots of false values and philosophies. Study the Bible so you will be able to see your way clear enough to stay on the right path.

Romans 12:2

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

God has good, pleasing, and perfect plans for his children. He wants us to be transformed people with renewed minds, living to honor and obey him. Because he wants only what is best for us, and because he gave his Son to make our new lives possible, we should joyfully give ourselves as living sacrifices for his service.

Christians are called to “not conform any longer to the pattern of this world,” with its behavior and customs that are usually selfish and often corrupting. Many Christians wisely decide that much worldly behavior is off limits for them. Our refusal to conform to this world's values, however, must go even deeper than the level of behavior and customs—it must be firmly planted in our minds—“be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” It is possible to avoid most worldly customs and still be proud, covetous, selfish, stubborn, and arrogant. Only when the Holy Spirit renews, reeducates, and redirects our minds are we truly transformed (see Romans 8:5).

Those who know the word of God will be blessed.

Luke 11:28

But he said, yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.

Jesus was speaking to people who put extremely high value on family ties. Their genealogies were important guarantees that they were part of God's chosen people. A man's value came from his ancestors, and a woman's value came from the sons she bore.

Jesus' response to the woman meant that a person's obedience to God is more important than his or her place on the family tree. The patient work of consistent obedience is even more important than the honor of bearing a respected son.

John 15:10-11

If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. [11] These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

True joy transcends the rolling waves of circumstance. Joy comes from a consistent relationship with Jesus Christ. When our lives are intertwined with his, he will help us walk through adversity without sinking into debilitating lows and manage prosperity without moving into deceptive highs. The joy of living with Jesus Christ daily will keep us level-headed, no matter how high or low our circumstances.

Those who know the word of God will grow in grace.

John 17:17

Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

A follower of Christ becomes sanctified (set apart for sacred use, cleansed and made holy) through believing and obeying the Word of God (Hebrews 4:12). He or she has already accepted forgiveness through Christ's sacrificial death (Hebrews 7:26-27). But daily application of God's Word has a purifying effect on our minds and hearts. Scripture points out sin, motivates us to confess, renews our relationship with Christ, and guides us back to the right path.

1 Peter 2:3

If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

One characteristic all children share is that they want to grow up—to be like big brother or sister or like their parents. When we are born again, we become spiritual newborn babies. If we are healthy, we will yearn to grow. How sad it is that some people never grow up. The need for milk is a natural instinct for a baby, and it signals the desire for nourishment that will lead to growth.

Once we see our need for God's Word and begin to find nourishment in Christ, our spiritual appetite will increase, and we will start to mature. How strong is your desire for God's Word?

Those who know the word will see success in God's eyes.

Joshua 1:8

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is

written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

Many people think that prosperity and success come from having power, influential personal contacts, and a relentless desire to get ahead. But the strategy for gaining prosperity that God taught Joshua goes against such criteria. He said that to succeed Joshua must (1) be strong and courageous because the task ahead would not be easy, (2) obey God's law, and (3) constantly read and study the Book of the Law—God's Word. To be successful, follow God's words to Joshua. You may not succeed by the world's standards, but you will be a success in God's eyes—and his opinion lasts forever.

Those who know the word will have power over sin.

Psalm 119:11

Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

Hiding (keeping) God's Word in our hearts is a deterrent to sin. This alone should inspire us to memorize Scripture. But memorization alone will not keep us from sin; we must also put God's Word to work in our lives, making it a vital guide for everything we do.

2 Peter 1:3-4

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: [4] Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

The power to grow doesn't come from within us, but from God. Because we don't have the resources to be truly godly, God allows us to "participate in the divine nature" in order to keep us from sin and help us live for him. When we are born again, God by his Spirit empowers us with his own moral goodness. See John 3:6; John 14:17-23; 2 Cor. 5:21; and 1 Peter 1:22-23.

Those who know the word will have victory over the devil and temptations.

Ephes. 6:17

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:

In the Christian life we battle against rulers and authorities (the powerful evil forces of fallen angels headed by Satan, who is a vicious fighter, see 1 Peter 5:8). To withstand their attacks, we must depend on God's strength and use every piece of his armor. Paul is not only giving this counsel to the church, the body of Christ, but to all individuals within the church. The whole body needs to be armed. As you do battle against "the powers of this dark world," fight in the strength of the church, whose power comes from the Holy Spirit.

Those who know the word will have comfort and assurance.

Romans 8:39

Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

These verses contain one of the most comforting promises in all Scripture. Believers have always had to face hardships in many forms: persecution, illness, imprisonment, even death. These could cause them to fear that they have been abandoned by Christ. But Paul exclaims that it is *impossible* to be separated from Christ. His death for us is proof of his unconquerable love. Nothing can stop Christ's constant presence with us. God tells us how great his love is so that we will feel totally secure in him. If we believe these overwhelming assurances, we will not be afraid.

Powers are unseen forces of evil in the universe, forces like Satan and his fallen angels (see Ephes. 6:12). In Christ we are super-conquerors, and his love will protect us from any such forces.

Those who know the word of God will have hope.

Hebrews 6:13-18

For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, [14] Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. [15] And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. [16] For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. [17] Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: [18] That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we

might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:

God's promises are unchanging and trustworthy because God is unchanging and trustworthy. When promising Abraham a son, God took an oath in his own name. The oath was as good as God's name, and God's name was as good as his divine nature.

These two unchangeable things are God's nature and his promise. God embodies all truth; therefore, he cannot lie. Because God is truth, you can be secure in his promises; you don't need to wonder if he will change his plans. Our hope is secure and immovable, anchored in God, just as a ship anchor holds firmly to the seabed. To the true seeker who comes to God in belief, God gives an unconditional promise of acceptance. When you ask God with openness, honesty, and sincerity to save you from your sins, *he will do it*. This truth should give you encouragement, assurance, and confidence.

Those who know the word of God will receive wisdom.

Psalm 19:7

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

When we think of the law, we often think of something that keeps us from having fun. But here we see the opposite—law that revives us, makes us wise, gives joy to the heart, gives light to the eyes, warns us, and rewards us. That's because God's laws are guidelines and lights for our path.

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