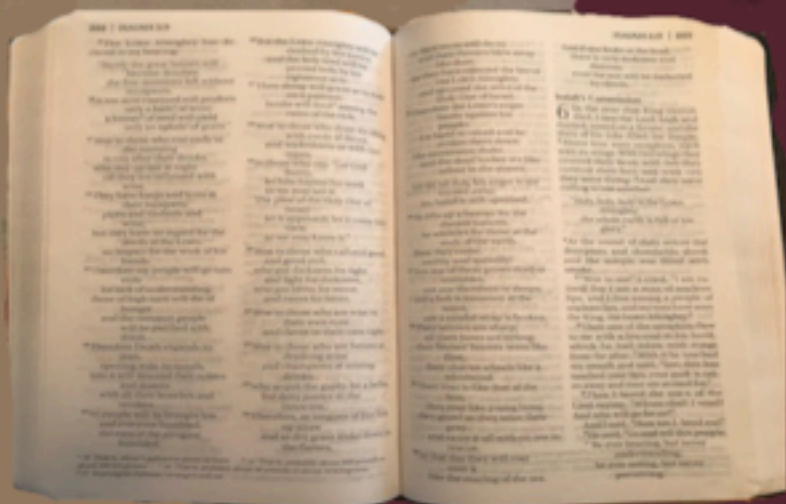


Devotional Thoughts From God's Word

A Daily Devotional

Your word I have treasured in my heart,
That I may not sin against You.- Ps 119::11



John H. King

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS
FROM GOD'S WORD

A Daily Reading

John H. King

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To all those who love God's Word.

Contents

Introduction.....	1
January 1.....	5
January 2.....	7
January 3.....	9
January 4.....	11
January 5.....	13
January 6.....	15
January 7.....	17
January 8.....	19
January 9.....	21
January 10.....	23
January 11.....	25
January 12.....	27
January 13.....	29
January 14.....	31
January 15.....	33
January 16.....	35

Introduction

Words can be a powerful friend or formidable enemy and we seldom realize their force when we say or read them. Paul warned the Galatians, to make the point clearer, against a spiritual cannibalism Galatians were verging on by their verbal jabs and biting words [Galatians 5:15]. The congregation at Ephesus had to be cautioned about the verbal assaults against the faith that come couched in flattering rhetoric, comedic sarcasm and abusive jeers, like children in the school yard [Ephesians 5:4]. Believers need to discover the secret of “walking in love” instead, with a more thankful perspective on what God is doing in and around them [Ephesians 5:2].

Some words, in our Bible, thought too well known or, as the case might be, not known at all, are often read past, like observing the landscape from the window of a fast moving car. Much of what we thought we heard or read, we really didn't comprehend. Here is where even a believer can assume things God never said or promised.

I have spent a lifetime being devoted to the Word of God but devotion may simply speak to an infatuation with the Book—a literary or theological interest. A real love must understand what the Word of God means and this requires experiencing its message. The “words” have to mean something! It is not without cause that we have made a tenet of the faith: the verbal plenary theory of divine inspiration—a belief that each and every word in our Bible is from God [2 Timothy 3:16].

An honest and prayerful inquiry into the Scripture must see *inside* its pages, and, perhaps even, between the lines at: the Book within the Book. We need to be looking past the Sunday School stories and the theological arguments, past the historical analysis of words, past the styles of individual writers, at the larger context of God's heart, the message of the Kingdom, of the Cross

Introduction

and grace—wherein dwells the real message, the real story God intended to bring to our ears and hearts.

The Bible is realistically clothed in the garb of cultural language and has been relayed to us by imperfect beings, but, the Bible message is still very much alive with meaning for those who endorse its truth and will live by it.

All this requires lifetimes of study, not just of the words, idioms, and phrases (as we imagine what a pristine first copy might read like without thousands of variants or proposed corrections) but of the context and how it all relates to us. We must experiment with its instructions (yes, experiment because some of us are not perfect yet). We must put into practice what we think the Word is telling us, and how to live it. We should ask the WWJD question (what would Jesus do?) though it is often spoken in jest but with real consequences. And we must live in a world of constant self-reflection and introspection in prayer, in conversation with God, lest we speed past what we are studying or hearing from God's pulpit.

We must stop disallowing obvious meanings where we find them, thinking instead to use a more complex explanation to defuse conviction and make what is clearly applicable to us, personally, not so applicable. There is a phrase in law [Res Ipsa Loquitur] which translates "the matter speaks for itself" or as some lawyers see it, "You'll know it when you see it." We must admit what we know already to be true—not to others, but first, to ourselves. And we must admit, as well, our lingering ignorance! Take a simple instruction like "love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind." We know whether or not we do! And yet again we are ever finding a deeper meaning to His love.

Avoid the "Dunning-Kruger" effect, which is a cognitive bias whereby people with limited knowledge or competence greatly overestimate their own knowledge or competence. I have had the occasional student of Greek who after a few lessons felt ready to argue with the clergy with years of learning under their belt.

At the same time, don't fall prey to the "Impostor Syndrome," in which one doubts the awesome change God has indeed been making in their life. These persons—I speak with

Introduction

great sensitivity—have been persistently internalizing fear of being exposed as frauds or hypocrites. It is true that the *more* they really do know, the *more* they discover how much *more* there is still to learn. (The operative term here is “*more*.”) And they fear they might be hiding behind a false pride because others see them as spiritual giants, saints, while they, like all believers, find themselves struggling with temptation as well as finding new veins of truth to mine in their quest to know God. I had serious reason for not wanting my General Overseer of our religious organization, back in the day, calling me Dr. King. I have no doctorate and even my Masters is stored away with the keep sakes my sons can toss when my ride comes for Glory. Like you, I am not who they say I am. Most people’s evaluation of you, I dare say, is far removed from God’s. Live with God’s!

We are all still in nursery school when it comes to learning God’s Word! Be as children who fumble at learning to speak or walk making all kinds of mistakes but without the least apology or fear of being called a poor excuse for a human. We are learning to live for Christ. Admittedly, we are growing spiritually, starting with the “milk of the Word” and proceeding later to “strong meat” [Hebrews 5:12]. Initially, we are going to fall down, now and then, but a serious interest in God’s Word eventually changes us for the better! We will learn to walk in it. And even our understanding of truth is a process. One minister told me once that he held off studying Jesus’ parables until he had grown a bit in Christ and my studies see the wisdom in that.

We must appreciate the Spirit’s conviction even while we are struggling with temptation or despondency or any one of a number of feelings and thoughts that might dim the fire of our zeal for God or distract us from Him with other interests. The thought crossed my mind, if Jesus hadn’t gone to Calvary to rescue fools like me, for whom did He die? As surprised as I might be to see you there, too, (no one is as much a sinner as I: 1 Timothy 1:15 “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”): “God has found all of us disobedient, that He might have mercy on all.” [Romans 11:32; Galatians 3:22].” The Bible says that none of us were unable to hit the target [Romans 3:23].

Introduction

And we must not panic because we seem to have more questions than answers, or because it seems like in places the Bible is self-contradictory or the Bible and science don't seem to agree. There are a few words in Scripture that have been given meanings at which the most brilliant scholars have only guessed. Other times it seems the significance of a verse is lost in a controversial haze. The clergy have also confused honest minds and open hearts by arguing vague and unimportant points of church teaching. Now many believers comb their Bible only to prove or disprove a point. (Not exactly God's reason for giving us His Book!)

In the spirit of really listening to God's Word, I have comprised the follow devotional anthology of lessons I have been struggling to incorporate into my daily routine, to "put on [the] new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy" [Ephesians 4:24 NLT]. These are not intended to give me a good feeling other than to encourage my faith and a clearer awareness of God's peace and presence. I must make no excuses but endeavor to be brutally honest with my heart, allow God's Word to expose to me the raw and unalloyed truth of who I really am and if this matches what I am doing, thinking, saying. "as is proper for saints" [Ephesians 5:3 CSB].

I want the Word of God to be a powerful friend [Romans 1:16] to me and not a formidable enemy [Ephesians 5:5].

January 1

At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me." - 2 Timothy 4:16-17a

The Expositors Commentary along with more recent scholarship interprets "*My first answer*" to mean Paul's court hearing now at the end of his life. The word "answer" means "defense." He was being arraigned but knew that this time he would not be freed [2 Timothy 4: 6].


What was his crime? "By me," he confessed, "the Lord commissioned and enabled me that the Gospel message might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear." [2 Timothy 4:17].

But Paul informed Timothy, "no one stood with me." Paul, like the Savior, had no one there to speak in his defense [Matthew 26:56]. Did he not say he wanted to partake of Christ's sufferings!

But the next thing he told Timothy is what stands out here: "*I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.*" Paul didn't hold it against anyone for not showing up during his arraignment.

- 1 *The words "I pray" were not written. I don't think this thought was directed at the Lord. When life's final moments are pending, its best to approach already with a forgiving heart.*
- 2 *The words are in the form of a wish, as if Paul were telling Timothy, "It's Okay. I don't fault anyone for not being here.*

Paul was so forgiving of the many [Philippians 1:13-14] that might have been available as defense witnesses. He had 2 reasons.

- 1 *He wrote confidently, " Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me." reminds me of Romans 8:31b, 33a : "If God be for us,*

January 1

who can be against us? ... Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?" [Matthew 10:19].

- 2 *Paul, also, knew he was soon to go home. "I have finished what God had called me to do! My fight is over. [2 Timothy 4: 7].*

In verse 7 Paul is writing with emphasis. I, also, believe we will know when this moment has arrived for each of us as believers and it will be Okay.]

In verse 7 he writes in this "perfect" sense 3 times: "fought, finished, kept." This form emphasizes completeness, finality, and permanence.

- 1 *His fight with the judaizers was over, finally, completely and for good.*
- 2 *His race was run and there would be no other.*
- 3 *And, as unexpected as this might sound, coming from Paul, the last temptation was won! [I thought only I am tempted!] The last act of Satan to undo him was defeated. Paul is going home!!*

These are the final thoughts of an elderly saint to his spiritual son. He has mellowed over the years. He has learned to be more understanding and accepting of the ambivalence of youth [Mark 15:39 comp 2 Timothy 4:11]. He is very much like a father now [1 Timothy 5:23].

"And for those believers I might have expected to support me in this moment but were not here," I can imagine Paul thinking, "it's Okay, son. Don't give it any thought:"

I'm going *home!*

January 2

If while we were still enemies we were reconciled with God through the death of His Son, much more rather now we shall be saved in being reconciled by His life. - Romans 5:10

If God, who is an eternal God, would go so far as to rescue His *enemies* from death in order to be reconciled as friends with them, this must mean *forever*, else why would He express such an extreme love!

Much More

If His death removed the sin and reconciled us, what would His resurrection provide!! [Romans 6:4].

Not only does our Lord pour out His love [Romans 5:3] and His Spirit [Acts 2:17], there is a “much more” attached to His many provisions! Not only is He merciful, the Bible uses the plural, *mercies*, but they are much more, brand new daily, like the manna; so, He is not just faithful, His faithfulness is *great* [Lamentations 3:23]. Everything about our God is immeasurable or infinite:

- “To God who is able to do for us what will far exceed anything we might request or imagine.....” [Ephesians 3:20].
- “in order that in the coming ages of forever He might demonstrate that immeasurable riches of his grace” [Ephesians 2:7].
- “If God did not spare his own Son but instead sacrificed Him in our place, what else would He not grant us!” [Romans 8:32]?
- The wealth of God’s wisdom and knowledge are beyond our understanding! His decisions beyond logic and what He does on our behalf we could never presume to know [Romans 11:33].

January 2

We are:

- *Not only justified but, **much more**, saved from wrath [Romans 5:9].*
- *Not only reconciled to God but, **much more**, forever [Romans 5:10].*
- *Not only forgiven but, **much more**, free from the sin [Romans 5:15, 17, 20].*
- *Not only was the Old Testament Law glorious but **much more**, Our Lord's ministry is among us. [2 Corinthians 3:9, 11].*
- *Not only is gold valuable but, **much more**, is our faith in Christ! [1 Peter 1:7].*

And there's even MORE ...**MUCH MORE!** ... A Celebration!!! [Romans 5:11 NLT]. Are you ready!!

Zephaniah 3:17 The LORD your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.

January 3

To explain, I reckon [reason], that the sufferings we endure now presently [in this life] are not worthy to be compared with [in proportion to] the coming glory that is about to be revealed in [for] us [in which we shall share]. - Romans 8:18

When man uses the word “but” he starts with the good news and adds the bad. “I like you but ...” God is the opposite. He starts with the bad news followed by the good. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” [Psalm 23:4]. “One may experience sorrow during the night, but joy arrives in the morning” [Psalm 30:5 NET]. Thus we can announce that suffering for Christ will always be followed with the most glorious blessings. Look at Romans 8:18.

- 1 **Reckon:** Paul never rationalized away suffering but accepting it, gave it its true value in relation to all the blessings of heaven that await us. [Romans 5:3-5].
- 2 **Worthy:** present sufferings put on the scale (balance) with God’s glory. The word comes from an old term meaning to move the needle of the scale.
- 3 **Glory:** God’s glory is far weightier. In fact the Hebrew for “glory” means “heavy.” Moses wrote, [Deuteronomy 28:58] “fear this *glorious [weighty]* and awesome name, THE LORD YOUR GOD.” [This word comes from the idea of weighing silver, the heavier, the more valuable or its worth.]
- 4 **Sufferings:** Here, sufferings, has to include or encompass all hardships, circumstantial and by evil design as well as all physical pain and misery as well as emotional or mental. The word encompasses the entire gamut of

January 3

unwelcome feelings and hurt associated with or as a consequence of our witness for Christ.

- Scholarship calls our suffering “the actual condition of our earthly life” and he includes “bodily infirmities and the necessities of life.” In other words, *all* suffering!
 - In 2 Corinthians 4:17 Paul referenced the trials that are the result of our witness that, in his words, “for the moment” [verse 16] exhaust us, weary us. These are put on one side of the scale. Here’s the “but;” God’s blessings outweigh them!
 - Here in Romans, Paul thought—to be fair—we will add to that side of the scale every source of unhappiness, pain, and misery that is a consequence of our faithfulness to God’s Word [Matthew 5:10]. *“In Romans 8:35, 37-39 NIV 35 Paul asked, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? ... For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*
 - Suffering doesn’t even move the needle. Even the lightest or smallest, most incidental blessing of God alone would outweigh all the trials and infirmities of this life. I trust we agree with Paul. I’ll shock you: Even if there were no heaven to come, God’s faithfulness, His love and grace, to me in this life, alone, has made serving Him all worth it!
- 5 **In us:** The word used here for “in” includes the idea of “for” It is a weakness of the English not having the equivalent of the Bible word. *In* us and *for* us means “The glory will not consist only *in our* own transformation [in], but also in the coming of the Lord himself, and the transformation of the universe [for us].”

January 4

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. - Genesis 1:1

Look into Genesis 1:1 the first four words in English, “In the Beginning, God...” Have we graduated in our understanding beyond these four words? I haven’t! This is a fundamental statement putting into words a fundamental truth about God that He is eternal because when everything else began, He was already here! And upon this revelation we build all our beliefs and hopes.

In light of this truth we explain life and develop a perspective that interprets our circumstances from blessings to disasters. Scholarship calls our belief in God’s existence “fundamental” which refers us to our vision of reality. God’s existence is in Genesis 1:1 the “self-evident truth which [is] tacitly acknowledged in everything we comprehend and assert.” Our lives, how we live, hereafter reveals whether we embrace these words as truth ...or no.

Sadly, those cosmologists and astro-physicists, who do not accept the Eternal God of Genesis 1:1, through the very brush of their own science have painted themselves into a corner and now theorize a “multiverse” hoping that, what cannot be shown or proved, will still sound reasonable to godless ears. You see, if God is (and He is) we cannot ignore Him!

An eternal God does eternal things. Augustin once opined, “Why did God make man, if He didn’t want to make Himself known to him.” If God is eternal, we are, too. “Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming” [1 Corinthians 15:23].

Our stay here: learning obedience, learning humility, learning to talk to God, getting to know Him on a personal level, learning to follow in His footsteps in the sands of time out of this valley of sorrows [Ps 23], is only a first step on our journey into His

January 4

eternity. It makes no “eternal” sense for God to want our fellowship for this life only.

Take a closer look at the parentheses that embrace this existence: in Genesis 1:16 God made the sun and in Revelation 22:5 He gets rid of it because He has made something called in the Greek text of Matthew 19:28 a paliggenesis [Titus 3:5], *a new Genesis!* the NIV interprets this, “the renewal of all things.” Revelation 21 speaks of a new heaven and a new earth.

As believers, we have only begun to be loved by Him!

January 5

"Are You not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O LORD, You have appointed them for judgment; O Rock, You have marked them for correction." - Habakkuk 1:12

The arrogance of the Babylonians, who imprisoned the tribe of Judah in exile, was unnerving [Habakkuk 1:10-11] The Babylonians attribute their military successes to their own strength as their god. Habakkuk, notwithstanding, is confident and hopeful that God will not permit His people to perish at their hands. The prophet's argument is that a Babylonian exile is an instrument of God's judgment and it is not Babylon's strength that brings victory.

"...we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." Paul reminds us [Ephesians 6:12].

Jeremiah A. Denton wrote from a Vietnam prison on Easter, 1969 about Mary while Jesus hanged on the Cross for us:

#

Her life with Him was full of signs
That God writes straight with crooked lines.
Dark clouds can hide the rising sin,
And all seems lost, when all is won.

#

"Man proposes but God disposes," the saying goes. [Ezekiel 26:3; Proverbs 16:9; Isaiah 10:5-6; Jeremiah 10:23]. Habakkuk prayed,

"Are You not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O LORD, You have appointed them for judgment; O Rock, You have marked them for correction" [1:12].

"We will not die!"

Habakkuk's hope (and ours) rests on 2 truths:

- 1 Jehovah is **my** God, Israel's God [Song of Solomon 6:3^L] not because we chose Him but because He chose us. [Psalm 65:4^L; John 15:16^L]. John Calvin astutely taught, *"Therefore, whoever desires to fight bravely ... let him first settle the matter with God himself, and, as it were, confirm and ratify the treaty which God has set before us, namely, that we are his people, and He will be a God to us in return."*¹ The god of the Babylonians is not God! Jehovah is my God! My God is always victorious in battle!
- 2 God is **Holy**. *"The absolutely Pure One who cannot look upon evil."*² God, because He is Holy, He will mercifully honor His commitment in covenant to judge or punish evil. **Jehovah's** name means *"the absolutely constant One, who is always the same in word and work"*³...from **everlasting**... **Correction** or chastisement might be indeed painful but God administers this unto His own children [Deuteronomy 8:5^L; Hebrews 12:6^L]. When David, probably because his faith was weak—unexpectedly and without cause—was in need of serious correction, he pleaded with the prophet, *"Please let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for His mercies are great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man"* [2 Samuel 24:10-14^L].


When Habakkuk maintains, *"we will not die."* he was not pleading with God to spare them, but affirming his faith that God chastises those He has chosen and whom He loves. And chastisement does not kill, it revives and brings us closer to Him.

January 6

Truly, God is good! - Psalm 73:1

I have been making an attempt at a weekly blog but a lot depends on my mood. My current mood, as I noted last week, is “contemplative.” That’s probably why I have taken a peaceful and meditative interest in Paul’s letter to the body of believers at Philippi. As an institution, all remembrance of them disappeared from the annals of church history by the

second century. But for Paul, as a Roman prisoner, the faces in this tiny congregation became a cherished memory that often reminded him that his life was never without meaning. He called them “beloved and his joy and crown” [Philippians 4:1]. Only the believers in Philippi and Thessalonica received such commendation. And Paul thought this of “all” the Philippians. No fewer than eleven times he spoke inclusively of every believer in this congregation as if his heart would not let him forget any of them. “Every time I recall the fellowship we shared,” (if I might translate freely) he noted, “I am overcome with joyous appreciation to the Lord for bringing us together. I pray for each of you often asking our Lord to meet every need you have” [Philippians 1:3-4].


The church at Philippi was never ensnared by the heresies and twisted, compromised, religious thinking of the day. Unlike the churches at Rome or Galatia or Ephesus or, indeed, Corinth, the Philippians were from the first day to the present (Paul’s own words, Philippians 1:5 ) fellow laborers in the gospel message. And Paul knew with absolute assurance God’s work among them would flourish [Philippians 1:6].

Then Paul’s pen must have hesitated because Philippians 1:7 can have two meanings according to the grammar: Did he write, “I have you in my heart” or “You have me in your heart”?

January 6

Why not both meanings! He added, “this is the absolute truth, and I know I’m right, And I see it this way about each and every one of you!”

You see, this shared passion for Christ, shared joy in their common salvation, and a shared interest in Christ’s sufferings through persecution, was a shared defense of and confirmation of the reality that is in serving Christ. Paul was never alone because he had been to Philippi and gone to the banks of the River Anghista to pray [Acts 16:13].

I could go on, playing the commentator of this warm recollection of what Paul’s service to the Savior was always all about. But I will let you study it for yourself. Paul didn’t know if his imprisonment would end in release [Philippians 2:24] or martyrdom [Philippians 2:17 

And what about my mood? I, too, have sweet abiding memories of what God did to which I bore joyful witness and of which now I sit in quiet meditation—of how good God is, indeed.

January 7


Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. - Habakkuk 3:17-18 NET

I have been unusually contemplative the last few days. This is not to say I have been despondent but more reflective, more aware of the feelings some of the people I have come to care about are feeling while I ramble on spewing my theological opinion. Some of the things God has had to do, told in the stories in the Old Testament, like killing Egyptian innocence and calling it love [Isaiah 43:2, 4] as well as what He has allowed to happen, like natural disasters and man's cruelty to man, make Him appear distant, uncaring, and if not this, to suggest Him—well—draconian, when He doesn't get His way.

I feel I have been left to explain Him or somehow spin His actions—or lack of action—in some merciful way—something I never imagined would be a part of ministry. Recently in a Bible study, I thought it an exciting idea to review the 7 sacrifices Moses wrote about. These speak of Christ and His death for our salvation. I forgot that someone whom I care very much about, and who was in this study, owns a farm on which they are raising some of the world's most lovable little lambs. And here I am talking about butchering them!"

"Happy is anyone who takes no offense in me," Jesus spoke caringly [Luke 7:23]. One translation [NLT] put the onus on us! *"God blesses those who do not turn away because of [Jesus]."* (And then the translator seemed to reconsider in a footnote, *"Or who are not offended by me"*). Even Jesus, at times, needed to explain Himself and at times the explanation was worse. *"I am the bread of life,"* Jesus argued with Jewish leaders who sought to entrap Him in His

January 7

words. They were discussing “manna.” And then the Savior raised His voice and cried, *“unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves”* [John 6:53]. That’s where He lost them. John 6:66  is one of the saddest scriptures: *“From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.”* I have come to cherish Peter’s response to all of this when the Savior asked him if he, too, would leave, *“Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life.”* Spot on, my brother!

I suppose at times God seemed cognitively dissonant. He instructed Hosea to marry a prostitute [Hosea 1:2] which represented in His mind Israel’s unfaithfulness. God was hurting—even if we can’t see it! (Marrying a prostitute was forbidden to the priests, Leviticus 21:7. According to Deuteronomy 22:21 virginity at marriage was sacrosanct.)

“What if your blessings come through raindrops?” Laura Story sung in “Blessings.” *“What if,”* she asked of the Lord, *“a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know You’re near? And what if trials of this life are Your mercies in disguise?”*


Many maintain, as the song goes, *“We’ll talk it over in the bye and bye. I’ll ask the reasons; He’ll tell me why.”* There is some truth here, but more immediately it helps to understand that mercy must be administered by a judge, *The Judge*, and our limited understanding of His rulings, His form of justice, is what probably bothers us most. Yet, Abraham seemed to know, *“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”* [Genesis 18:25]

Amen, Brother, Amen.

January 8

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.- Romans 8:28

Can there be an “up” without a “down”? A mountain peak without a valley? Do we recognize good only because it is not the evil we had known? Does happiness override sadness? Is love requited a sign that our loneliness is at an end?

What we are asking” Is it the bad that now serves to recognize the good for what it is? The greater the difference between opposites, the more pronounced that difference, the more we appreciate the change. “I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection ... becoming like him in his death,” Paul testified [Philippians 3:10 ]. God can even use the bad to develop the good in us. Paul noted that tribulation (stress, hard times, opposition) leads through patience, character, and hope to a recognition of God’s love [Romans 5:3-5].

The Lord never takes something away without replacing it with something else far better. [This is a wise practice counselors and therapists as well as medical professionals have discovered, that addictions cannot be starved to death without replacing them with more wholesome behavior.]

“Do not get drunk on wine,” Paul counseled, “which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit” [Ephesians 5:18]. Wine might be representative of all kinds of addictions from drugs, any entheogen, pornography, etc. Consider the exchanges God has made and will make in us that have transformed our lives:

- “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh” [Ezekiel 36:26].

January 8

- “By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear” [Hebrews 8:13].
- “Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” [Revelation 21:1].
- “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” [2 Corinthians 5:17].

Evil is not this way. With sin, things just get worse without any benefit in exchange. Satan doesn't believe in filling an empty life with something better: “When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first.” [Luke 11:24-26]

We must not look on all the things we did that were self-destructive—before we knew the conviction of the Spirit and the forgiveness that is in Christ—as a worthless existence, irredeemable. A shameful past now serves to magnify what God has done and is doing for us and validates the change God is making in us for His glory [Romans 8:28].

We must reconcile with our past if it represents a life we no longer live thanks to Christ.

January 9

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. - Hebrews 12:1-2 ESV

We take comfort in calling this life a “pilgrimage” in which our real home is in heaven (John 14:2-3) along with our true citizenship as believers (Philippians 3:20). Yet before we get there, it’s all about ...“the journey.” The Scripture that comes to mind is Hebrews 12:2) which was written to the early Jewish believers who were holding on too tightly to their religious traditions to appreciate the changes happening in their experience as believers. We, as followers of Christ, have come to view suffering (1 Peter 5:9) as a real part of our worldview. Sometimes it hurts to be a Christian either because of some form of persecution or being marginalized by family or others, or perhaps, because we didn’t realize that life goes on—same job, same emotional luggage, same “headaches” are brought along with us on this journey. Our faith has not immunized us against pain or hurt.

Yes, God knows when this or that in our circumstance is a hinderance to what He is perfecting in us and He will remove it accordingly (Revelation 3:7), but somehow our humanity is very much a part of life as it always was. The temptations are just as real, sickness is just as real. We may become flummoxed about the paradoxical inconvenience of pain while knowing that God’s faithfulness and love were never more real as when we are hurting. Suffering on many levels remains a part of life *as it did for the Savior!*

What has changed? We have Jesus as both our example to follow and the One who will “perfect” our faith. Our trust in Him

January 9

will be absolutely rewarded. He is irrefutably trustworthy. He didn't save us to abandon us! That's what "perfect" means.

But the gem of this verse is found in the word "for." When Jesus was, Himself, looking at a level of suffering off the scale of human endurance, He knew that at the other end of what He must endure, there was a joy. Joy is what Mary Magdalene and "the other" Mary experienced when an angel told them Jesus was alive! (Matthew 28:8). Joy is what awaits us when He welcomes us home! (Matthew 25:21, 23).

Meanwhile we "endure," we soldier on (is what it means)! And it makes a huge difference if we are looking at our tired legs or heaving diaphragm, or, instead, at that joy that is ours—to use Paul's analogy from verse one—after this race is run! For some of us, the banner over the finish line is almost visible. It reads "Enter into the Joy of Your Lord." And if we see it, it inspires us, or, as verse three reads, encouragingly, "so that [we] may not grow weary or fainthearted" when we are so close to that mark!

I had to run the mile in high school in 6 minutes to pass Physical Education. I was running far too slowly to make that clock until a friend of mine, realizing the shortfall, jumped on the track in front of me and yelled out, "Keep up!!" All I knew was I had to keep up with Carl as hard as it was to breathe (compliments of my asthma) or how my legs aches. I kept up ... and passed!

Let's keep up with Jesus!

January 10

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. - John 17:20

Here Jesus begins to envision something beyond incredible but not incredulous. As the old preacher reminded me, Jesus died, not so much to get us into heaven as to get heaven into us. A unity with His church that parallels that of the Holy Trinity can only mean that we have arrived at the very threshold of the Kingdom. Unity is only possible if all interests are centered in Christ. Unity is only possible if our personal desires—if I may be a bit cryptic or metaphorical—reduce to a common denominator, absolute humility, so that God can easily take the sum of all our ministries together. Unity is only possible when believers are at peace with one another, when we willingly submit unto one another allowing each to minister to the other as the Spirit directs. Unity means no racism, no lies, no personal ambition, no greedy grasping for attention or fame. Unity means we take personal possession of nothing but have already laid all our crowns at His feet. Unity means all things in common and no one has unmet needs. Unity is the ultimate revival! Unity is one passion, according to Acts 2:1. Unity, the Greek word is “One,” was a vision the Church caught on its first day at its birth while it was still in its cradle, its infancy, in Acts 4:32. “One heart, one soul.” But have we outgrown this?

I was surprised to hear Jesus praying for this because we have been so divided and denominationalized over the centuries, because we have prided ourselves in our hermeneutics and traditions and rituals and doctrines. Because we have stayed in our church circles and were told to stay there. Other christians in other circles were strangers in the night of a world drifting more and more distant from God.

January 10

Jesus was praying for us because He was praying for them, for the masses, for harvesters to seek out the Lord of the harvest (singular) and allow the Holy Spirit's ministry in us and then through us to show us how to wield a sickle (Matthew 9:38). But, if we think His High-Priestly prayer here is the first sign of a burden for the "lost," we must reread the Gospels. Not only did He weep over cities (Matthew 23:37) and swing wide in His travels outside Israel to minister to even gentiles (Matthew 15:21; John 4), we must remember that He came to die for them, too!

Perhaps, it is time to look at the word used for "prayer" [to ask or request]. There are a couple other words, synonyms, which scholars argue over. I shall not engage them, but it might be safe to say that the nuance with our word here is to "ask God to do [not give] something. Jesus is not seeking for anything personal. We have maintained throughout that He has remained self-less. He is asking His Father to pull off the miracle of miracles, to unite us for the sake of the harvest of souls! There is nothing more self-less than that except His soon crucifixion.

January 11

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, passive homosexual partners, practicing homosexuals, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, the verbally abusive, and swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of God. - 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 NET

Yesterday evening the men’s study, I am part of, was into 1 Corinthians 6 which included verses 9-10.

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, passive homosexual partners, practicing homosexuals, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, the verbally abusive, and swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

This is strong language which understandably we wish to interpret in an excusatory way if it appears to indict us. So, perhaps, this has nothing to do with having affairs outside of wedlock? Is Paul talking only about “ladies of the night”? At least, allow us to get drunk at weddings or excuse us if we are working ourselves to death (7 days a week) to “get ahead” without calling us “greedy.” Certainly the practice of homosexuality here does not include lesbianism or true “gay” marriage! And “gossip” is not abusive, if it’s true! Swindlers! I got all my money legally!! Oh, and idolatry, idol worship? No one does that anymore!

I mention this for its relevance in our time. Obviously, there is no finger pointing intended here. This is for introspection only. Paul used the term “shame” in verse 5 to encourage self-introspection for all true believers to see where their convictions are at. What does our conscience tell us? We are not trying to rationalize some cognitive dissonance that makes Paul’s words sound good for us but not “the other,” targeting persons we do not like.

January 11

We are in the birth pains of a cultural revolution; but we must remember that God's Word transcends culture. It would be dangerous, in terms of a meeting with God as the Judge, to assume whatever Paul is talking about, had nothing to do with our society; that it was only about something religious or cultic within the Corinthian community. It would be foolish, for example, to think that internet pornography (which we do not need to define, because we know it when we see it) would be exempt from this list of vices.


"Passive homosexuality" mentioned here was indeed the abuse of catamites. But dare we assume this must mean boys only! The ancient Israelites were warned, instead, about temple prostitution—things we can read about in Herodotus. And should we assume that such a judgment does not embrace a few traffickers of children of any age or gender!

This is a difficult subject because it is obvious to all that morality is culturally being defined not only with relaxed norms but in a way that mocks God, making our Bible sound like something straight out of grandma's imagination and nothing more.

The church, however, must promote, first and foremost, God's Word, which seems clearer when studied with an open heart and mind— and thus the word "shame" used here. The next chapter is next week when we discuss marriage from God's perspective. If God created one Adam for one Eve, something every believer accepts as indicative of the Divine plan for marriage, what does this say about God's thoughts on today's lifestyles? If we say, "Nothing," well, shame on us!

We may in the midst of this cultural revolution soon pay a price for our commitment to God's Word; so, we best know what we are willing to endure ...and why!

January 12

Jesus made a rather startling and “seemingly” rash statement in His celebrated “Sermon on the Mount.” Luke (6:20), the journalist, informs us that Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor.” And “poor” means “poor.” This word is distinguished in the New Testament from the word meaning to earn your daily ‘bread’ by labor. This last (2 Corinthians 9:9 ) lives from paycheck to paycheck. He is not impoverished as our word “poor” indicates. Our word, Jesus used, means to beg for it, or in our case, to pray for it, to trust God for it: “give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6: 11).

Blessed are those who trust God for their daily sustenance! Shannon Adler wrote, “Hide yourself in God, so when a man wants to find you, he will have to go there first.”

I am reading Schweizer’s work, “Red-Handed” which highlights the effort of people in power (both sides of the isle) to get—not rich but—richer. It represents the biblical idea of “greed” which Paul called a form of idol worship (Colossians 3:5). Paul called it an ‘impassioned evil’. The Greek word, according to scholarship, designates “the fiercer and ever fiercer longing of the creature which has forsaken God, to fill itself with the lower objects of sense.” Trench calls it “the monsters of lust.” Cicero called it a “rapacious avarice.”

It is more than a “love of money” which is its offspring and which may even attract the most religious (Luke 16:14) . Money for money’s sake is not greed. It is its toady. The lover of money only wants to hoard it; the greedy are consumers who use it for what they can purchase—even if money is purchasing more money—or worse, power. Beware consumerism for consumerism’s sake!

January 12

Happiness, Jesus cautioned, is not in the Best Buy or in purchasing power. Happiness is a reliance on our Lord to sustain us! (2 Corinthians 9:10)

Schweizer's book is about "the families of congressional leaders and how they "secured hundreds of millions of dollars in lucrative deals. ... How the biggest names on Wall Street ... get the inside track on billion-dollar deals." Think what you will of Schweizer, the point was poignantly made by the Savior, "God said to the greedy, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be!'" (Luke 12:20).

When I began a study of the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the mount, "Blessed are the poor" included the words from Matthew's account "... in spirit" (Matthew 5:3) which some copyists of the Greek text sought to, in error, include here in Luke's account. But now I keep them separate believing BOTH ideas carried a great importance for the Savior.

"Praise the Lord; praise God our savior! For each day he carries us in his arms." [PSALM 68:19 NET]

There is no shame in trusting God for all our needs; in fact, it is the circumstance of the blessed! The last thing any believer should want is a winning lottery ticket which brings with it a multitude of woes! The last thing we want is to discard our Lord's interest in our lives for the pursuit of temporary pleasures.

When your bank account dwindles, your stock options lose worth, your favorite toy is broken, you struggle to make the mortgage or rent or you are down to the jar of peanut butter for food for you and the children, remember God!

Learn to trust Him! He won't let you down. You'll find *real* happiness!

January 13

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. - 2 Peter 1:4

When I write, I sense, that often my reader's theological sensitivities are rattled if not offended. But in my defense, it's not my fault but the language of Scripture that often

nuances a word differently from how we are prone to interpret it. Preachers often translate Scriptural thoughts in a way slanted to make more sense to the occidental mind, to the way we think or understand things, even though most Scripture was written to the oriental or (semitic) thinker.

Case in point: There is no Hebrew, Old Testament, word for "promise." The word "promise" is used five times to translate the Hebrew word into Greek in the Bible but these leave room for doubt as to the accuracy of the translation. Nowhere does the Old Testament Scripture use the phrase "the promises of God."

Twice in Esther 4:7 the Hebrew states simply the Haman said to the king. The Greek translation interpreted this as his promise to the king which the English translations kept.

In Psalms 56:8, the New King James Version seems closest, "You number my wanderings; Put my tears into Your bottle; Are they not in Your book?" The Greek is a rather free interpretation of the Hebrew which adds the words, "even according to Thy promise."

Proverbs 13:12 in the Hebrew, according to the NIV, reads "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life." But the Greek reads, "Better is he that begins to help heartily, than he that promises and leads another to hope; for a good desire is a tree of life."

January 13

Amos 9:6 in the Hebrew says, "He [God] builds his lofty palace[unsure of word] in the heavens and sets its foundation[unsure of word] on the earth; he calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land— the LORD is his name." The Greek says, "He ...establishes His promise on the earth [words not found in the Hebrew]".

In seven different verses the King James uses our word "promise" in the translation. Numbers 14:34 "breach of promise" speaks of God's opposition. [interesting that the Hebrew word is spelled "NO" In 1 Kings 8:56 the Hebrew talks about God's "good words."

I can begin to see way the translators might like the word "promises" I will leave you to look up the rest. In each case the English word "promise" interprets the Hebrew word "Word" which in the Greek is the well known theological term "logos." We know the "Logos" of God is Jesus Himself (John 1:1)! Think about it.

A recognition of God's Word as His promises to us is best explained in 2 Peter 1:4 "Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises [the actual Greek word], so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." Jesus was sent as the incarnate or the embodiment of "The Word of God" to bring about our "participation" in His holiness freeing us from a world of "evil."

What else did He promise? What else should He have promised?

January 14

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. - 1 Peter 2:9

Family was everything in ancient Judean society. Cultural norms as well as laws or policies were inaugurated by God through Moses to safeguard a family's inheritance from abject and austere poverty where a family had to sell the homestead and their land or even, become another's servant to pay off debt.

A most noteworthy example of this arrangement is the story of Ruth (Ruth 2:20) in which Boaz, a kinsman of Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, fulfilled the law in marrying Ruth (Ruth 4:4-5, 9-10). The idea behind this legal provision was to restore a family's wealth, rescue a family member from poverty or slavery, or to repurchase their possessions to maintain the inheritance and preserve the legacy of another family member. An interesting example is Jeremiah purchasing his uncle's field, knowing that in 70 years, they will be able to re-own it (Jeremiah 32:6-8).

The language of the Bible had a special word for this arrangement not found in other cultures of the time. The word is *redeemer*. Clearly, this right of a kinsman [a blood relative], who had the resources, the money, to repurchase the homestead of a family member who has fallen on hard times is peculiarly Scriptural. One could argue that God had another redemption in mind in giving us such a culturally outspoken and unique Old Testament covenantal idea. "I, the LORD, am your Savior and **Redeemer**" (Isaiah 60:16).

Every Sunday morning, in the church I attended as a lad, we closed the AM service with Psalm 19:14 (it was KJV back then): "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and **my redeemer.**"

At the time, I had no idea how sacred, how special, how very biblical, were these words, "Lord, my *kinsman* redeemer." It is not enough to say, as we have been, Jesus' death and resurrection redeemed, freed, us from the slavery of sin. He did this as our elder brother (Romans 8:29). He did this as family (Matthew 12:50).

"In Israel, family members were redeemed from a variety of social situations such as debt, captivity, slavery, exile and liability to execution. In the New Covenant, the new arrangement that was validated in Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus is not called our redeemer but our *redemption* because reference is being made to the *method* by which He purchased our salvation. "He (Jesus) entered the most holy place once for all time, not by the blood of goats and calves, but **by his own blood**, having obtained eternal redemption." (Hebrews 9:12) He purchased us with Himself for God! Again, we are family, which explains why through the writings of the apostles we are repeatedly called His brethren, brothers and sisters. [Evangelicals have carried this theme to the present day.]

He is our redemption. He has freed us from a spiritual bondage to sin. "that we may no longer be enslaved to sin" (Romans 6:6). Paul called us, God's family (Romans 8:15). Peter called us, collectively, a special race of people, a special nation of saints, the kids of the King of kings. We are His possession, His family! "But you are a chosen race [of people], a royal priesthood [saints all, members of the Royal family of heaven], a holy nation, [citizen's of heaven], [God's] people, belonging to Him, so that you may spread far and wide how glorious a redemption He gave, [of Him] who called you out of [spiritual] darkness into the incomprehensible light of His glory" (1 Peter 2:9).

January 15

Mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. - Jude 2

Only deceivers are complicated. “Oh what a tangled web we weave/When first we practice to deceive,” Sir Walter Scott wrote. Genuineness and spontaneous responses—established of love, gentleness, and mercy—are simple, and that is why we say God shows simplicity. There is a sense in which He judges mercifully, He administers justice for the sake of His creation whom He loves.

There is a well-known verse that profiles God, “God is not a liar like some men might be; He does not deceive; He is transparently honest; He is not a human being dealing with regret over mistakes and bad choices. What He promises, He does; do you think otherwise!? When does He speak and it doesn’t happen just as He said? ” (Numbers 23:19).

The doctrine of simplicity, teaches, then, that

- 1 **God is unlike any other** being; “The Lord’s mercy and love exceed far beyond our expectations.” (Psalm 145:3) and that
- 2 **God is perfect**, that is, God’s actions do not share in the limitations of human actions. God’s intentions, what He purposes to do, He does. “My word that comes from my mouth will accomplish what I please and will prosper in what I send it to do” (Isaiah 55:11). There is no difference between what God intends to do and what He accomplishes. We , however, see these two ideas as distinct.

Understanding God, though, is another matter. Our knowledge of God is on a pre-heaven level. It will be important later to dive into some terms used to describe God because they explain His simplicity. Irenaeus calls God an “**uncompounded**

January 15

Being, without diverse members, and altogether like, and equal to himself, since he is wholly understanding, ... spirit, ...thought, ...intelligence, ...reason, and wholly hearing, ...seeing and light and the whole source of all that is good." In simple language: "It is an utter impossibility for God not to be all He is: both merciful *and* just."

Looking at God through a single lens (of divine love) , interpreting all His actions in terms of His love for us, not only inspires our understanding of God's Word but it explains everything about our relationship with Him as believers. "I indeed know exactly what I will for you," the Lord shares His thoughts, "plans for your peace and spiritual prosperity, not misfortune or ruin, but ultimately what you have longed for all along." (Jeremiah 29:11)

It is our limited reasoning, limited by how we experience life and what we have learned about our own humanity that we endlessly compare our reasoning with God's and ask so many questions about Calvary that may be above our current comprehension.

Simplicity shows how God could be merciful and at the same time exact a penalty for sin, how His justice could be both retributive and restorative. The doctrine of a divine simplicity for God attempts to show that when God is exercising one attribute of His nature, He is exercising all attributes of His nature. His justice is always merciful. When He displays His anger, He is fierce, but it is a feature of His jealous love for His people. "The LORD is jealous...." (Nahum 1:2; Joel 2:18)

Simplicity teaches that He does all things as an expression of His love. "He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the LORD's unfailing love"(Ps. 33:5; 89:14). All this can be said in one sentence: A study of Calvary is really a study about the love of God, that is, a study of the nature of God.

January 16

But the fruit of the Spirit is ... self-control. Against such there is no law. - Galatians 5:22-23

One more thing which until recently puzzled me: How could one of the Fruit of the Spirit be “temperance” [self-control: Galatians 5:23]? This word in our New Testament is found only twice elsewhere:

- ◆ 2 Peter 1:2 sandwiched between knowledge and godliness and
- ◆ in Paul’s response to Felix, the Roman procurator of Judea appointed by the emperor Claudius in A.D. 53. (Felix ruled the province in a cruel, and profligate manner. His period of office was full of troubles. Paul was kept in custody there two years in hopes of extorting money from him). In Acts 24:25 this word was part of a discussion on righteousness and the coming judgment.

It means “to exercise self-control, to restrain oneself.” In Genesis 43:31, Joseph held back tears of joy while he was still unknown to his brothers. In 1 Samuel 13:12 Saul’s excuse to Samuel for not waiting on the prophet before offering a burnt offering was that he had to “force himself” to do it—an excuse for yielding to a temptation. And that has to be the point: “And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” [Galatians 5:24-25].