

CONNECT 7 DAILY DEVOTIONS

Heart Issues

are

HARD ISSUES

A Sermon Series on Racial Healing
in the Church and for the Community



Heart Issues are Hard Issues

A Sermon Series on Racial Healing in the Church and for the Community

The Church has every right under our nation's law, and, more importantly, every obligation under the Lordship of Jesus Christ to speak into the political, moral, and social issues facing our United States. Issues of social-economic inequity, historic and systemic racial injustice, a punitive rather than restorative justice system, poorly performing and poorly funded schools in our poorest neighborhoods effectively guaranteeing generational poverty, an atmosphere in which police are more like soldiers in battle than guardians of the peace, and the resultant deaths of black men at the hands of police followed by peaceful protests and vengeful violence all scream for God's Spirit to speak His peace, His truth, His love, His righteousness, His justice, His hope, and His healing into His world. His people simply must speak His Word. His people must live His life as the Spirit-filled Body of Christ and be emissaries of His new creation and His coming kingdom.

So, how do we go about doing that? How do we lean into our responsibility in this timely opportunity to speak and live as God's mouthpiece?

Over the next 7 weeks we will consider the appointed readings. We will intentionally address their message from God to His people in the context of the racial tension in our nation and how God's chosen saints in Christ Jesus can think, speak, pray, and act. We seek the Holy Spirit's wisdom and power to be our best selves as Christ's ambassadors to a sin-fallen world; and specifically, to address racial issues that are in the forefront today. We will discover that we first need to respond in repentance before God for our own role in racial injustice—whether active or passive, intentional or in ignorance, whether one is black or white. We will also seek God's healing through Christ's cross and, from there, carry the message of His cross into our purposeful conversations and active engagements with people who are different from us.

(Our Michigan District of the LC-MS has developed this sermons series and has strongly encouraged all congregation to use this series and consider how we can as Christians intentionally address the racial issues in our nation.)

September 20

Theme: All That Matters, Philippians 1:12-30

Readings: Isaiah 55:6-9, Psalm 27:1-9, Philippians 1:12-14, 19-30

September 27

Theme: Whom Shall I Love and Whom Shall I Fear?, Philippians 2:1-18

Readings: Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32, Psalm 25:1-10, Philippians 2:1-4, 14-18

October 4

Theme: Bringing the Fruit of His Steadfast Love, Philippians 3:4b-14

Readings: Isaiah 5:1-7, Psalm 80:7-19, Philippians 3:4b-14, Matthew 21:33-46

October 11

Theme: We Are One in Christ, Philippians 4:4-13

Readings: Isaiah 25:6-9, Psalm 23, Philippians 4:4-13, Matthew 22:1-14

October 18

Theme: Healing for Deep Afflictions, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Readings: Isaiah 45:1-7, Psalm 96: 1-9, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10, Matthew 22:15-22

October 25

Theme: It Just Takes one Word – No One is Left Out, Revelation 14:6-7

Readings: Revelation 14:6-7, Psalm 46, Romans 3:19-28, John 8:31-36

November 1

Theme: Reconciliation Out of Tribulation, Revelation 7:1-17

Readings: Revelation 7:9-17, Psalm 149, 1 John 3:1-3, Matthew 5:1-12

Connecting to Worship: September 20

Theme: All That Matters, Philippians 1:12-30

Readings: Isaiah 55:6-9, Psalm 27:1-9, Philippians 1:12-14, 19-30

particularly important—the story doesn't just end, for God leaves nothing unfinished.

Begin with the End

Monday September 14, 2020

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:6

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Philippians 1:3–11

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” I was often asked that question as a child. And the answers changed like the wind. A doctor. A firefighter. A missionary. A worship leader. A physicist—or actually, MacGyver (a favorite TV character)! Now, as a dad of four kids, I think of how difficult it must be for them to be asked that question. There are times when I want to say, “I know what you'll be great at!” Parents can sometimes see more in their children than the children can see in themselves.

This resonates with what Paul saw in the Philippian believers—those he loved and prayed for (Philippians 1:3). He could see the end; he knew what they'd be when all was said and done. The Bible gives us a grand vision of the end of the story—resurrection and the renewal of all things (see 1 Corinthians 15 and Revelation 21). But it also tells us who's writing the story.

Paul, in the opening lines of a letter he wrote from prison, reminded the Philippian church that “he who began a good work in you will carry it on to *completion* until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6). Jesus started the work and He'll complete it. The word *completion* is

By: Glenn Packiam

Reflect & Pray

Where are you in your story? How can you trust Jesus to take the “pen” from your hand and to bring your story to completion?

Dear Jesus, You're in charge of my story. It's not up to me to make it happen. I surrender my life to You. Help me to trust You.

To learn more about who you are and how you can best serve God.

The Shrinking Piano
Tuesday September 15, 2020

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:6

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Philippians 1:1–11

For three consecutive years, my son participated in a piano recital. The last year he played, I watched him mount the steps and set up his music. He played two songs and then sat down next to me and whispered, “Mom, this year the piano was smaller.” I said, “No, it’s the same piano you played last year. You’re bigger! You’ve grown.”

Spiritual growth, like physical growth, often happens slowly over time. It is an ongoing process that involves becoming more like Jesus, and it happens as we are transformed through the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2).

When the Holy Spirit is at work in us, we may become aware of sin in our lives. Wanting to honor God, we make an effort to change. Sometimes we experience success, but at other times, we try and fail. If it seems like nothing changes, we get discouraged. We may equate failure with a lack of progress, when it’s often proof that we are in the middle of the process.

Spiritual growth involves the Holy Spirit, our willingness to change, and time. At certain points in our lives, we may look back and see that we have grown spiritually. May God give us the faith to continue to believe that “He who began a good work in [us] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6).

By: Jennifer Benson Schuldt

Reflect & Pray

Dear God, give me a desire to grow spiritually.

I want to honor You with my life and experience the joy of the Spirit’s work inside of me.

Spiritual growth is a process.

Our Moral Compass

Wednesday September 16, 2020

If My people . . . turn from their wicked ways,
then I will . . . forgive their sin and heal their
land. —

2 Chronicles 7:14

Today's Scripture:

2 Chronicles 7:1-14

When Abraham Lincoln was introduced to author Harriet Beecher Stowe, he reportedly said that she was “the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war.”

Although President Lincoln’s comment wasn’t entirely serious, Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was instrumental in abolishing slavery in the US. Its graphic depiction of racism and the injustice of slavery helped lead to the start of civil war. Ultimately, Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation declared that all slaves “shall be free.” Thus, Stowe’s novel helped to change a nation’s moral compass.

Centuries earlier, King Solomon was told about what would change the moral compass of God’s people Israel. It was to start with humility and confession. The Lord told Solomon: “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14).

As a Christian community, we should first take an inventory of our own personal lives. As we humbly seek God in prayer and repentance of sin, changes begin in our lives. God may then use us to change a nation’s moral compass.

By: Dennis Fisher

Reflect & Pray

Revive us again, Fill each heart with Thy love;
May each soul be rekindled With fire from
above. —Mackay

Nothing is politically right which is morally
wrong. —O'Connell

Beware Of Open Doors
Thursday September 17, 2020

Folly is joy to him who is destitute of discernment, but a man of understanding walks uprightly. —

Proverbs 15:21

Today's Scripture:

Philippians 1:8-11

Sometimes Christians follow an “open door” policy. When a door of opportunity opens, they assume that it’s God’s will to go through it.

Bestselling author Terri Blackstock knows this is untrue. She never openly rebelled against God, but she found herself far away from Him after walking through open doors of opportunity. “I had allowed myself to believe that God was blessing my career . . . because He had opened all the doors,” she wrote in Soul Restoration. Although she got what she wanted—a successful career writing romance novels for Harlequin and Silhouette—she lost what she needed: a close relationship with God.

When she finally admitted that her career was keeping her from God, she turned her back on success and renewed her commitment to the Lord. Since then, her writing career has been revitalized, and she has become an award-winning author of Christian fiction.

Just because the Lord doesn’t stop us from something doesn’t mean He wants us to continue. To discern which opportunities to pursue, we need to “approve the things that are excellent” and to be “filled with the fruits of righteousness . . . to the glory and praise of God” (Phil. 1:10-11).

By: **Julie Ackerman Link**

Reflect & Pray

The best way to know God’s will is to say “I will” to God.

Singing with Violet
Friday September 18, 2020

I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

Philippians 1:23–24

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Philippians 1:21–26

An elderly woman named Violet sat on her bed in a Jamaican infirmary and smiled as some teenagers stopped to visit with her. The hot, sticky, midday air came into her little group home unabated, but she didn't complain. Instead, she began wracking her mind for a song to sing. Then a huge smile appeared and she sang, "I am running, skipping, jumping, praising the Lord!" As she sang, she swung her arms back and forth as if she were running. Tears came to those around her, for Violet had no legs. She was singing because, she said, "Jesus loves me—and in heaven I will have legs to run with."

Violet's joy and hopeful anticipation of heaven give new vibrancy to Paul's words in Philippians 1 when he referred to life-and-death issues. "If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me," he said. "I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far" (vv. 22–23).

Each of us faces tough times that may cause us to long for the promise of heavenly relief. But as Violet showed us joy despite her current circumstances, we too can keep "running, skipping, praising the Lord"—both for the abundant life He gives us here and for the ultimate joy that awaits us.

By: Dave Branon

Reflect & Pray

Lord, when times are tough, help me to find joy. Help us to live in the tough times of this world with happiness while looking ahead to something "better by far."

Connecting to Worship, September 20

Theme: All That Matters, Philippians 1:12-30

Readings: Isaiah 55:6-9, Psalm 27:1-9,
Philippians 1:12-14, 19-30

Connecting to Worship: September 27

Theme: Whom Shall I Love and Whom Shall I Fear?, Philippians 2:1-18

Readings: Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32, Psalm 25:1-10, Philippians 2:1-4, 14-18

Hadrian's Wall Monday September 21, 2020

[Christ] has broken down the middle wall of separation. —
Ephesians 2:14

Today's Scripture:

Ephesians 2:11-18

When Julius Caesar invaded the south coast of Britain in 55 BC, he met resistance from warring Celtic tribes. But a century later, Roman control had extended all the way north into what is now Scotland.

The conquest took 30,000 Celtic lives, but the Roman victory was short-lived. Surviving clansmen soon began a fierce guerrilla campaign against their occupiers. So in AD 122, Emperor Hadrian ordered a wall constructed to separate the Romans from the barbarians to the north. Hadrian's Wall stands to this day.

In Jesus' day, a barrier stronger than Hadrian's Wall stood between God's people and the Gentiles who were outside their spiritual community. It was the barrier of ethnic prejudice. God's design was to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; Isa. 51:2). But instead of being a witness to the nations, Israel nurtured prejudice against the Gentiles.

Prejudice and racism remain with us today, even in the church. Such attitudes do damage to our witness of Christ's love for all people. Jesus laid down His life to redeem people from every tribe and nation. We must not only accept them, we must love them as our

brothers and sisters in Christ (Gal. 3:28-29; Rev. 5:9).

By: Dennis Fisher

Reflect & Pray

Thinking It Over

Are you willing to take the first step to understand fellow believers who are different from you? How can you befriend believers from other cultures?

Christ's love creates unity out of diversity.

The Interests of Others

Tuesday September 22, 2020

In humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests.

Philippians 2:3-4

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Philippians 2:1-11

My friend Jaime works for a huge international corporation. In his early days with the company, a man came by his desk, struck up a conversation, and asked Jaime what he did there. After telling the man about his work, Jaime asked the man his name. "My name is Rich," he replied.

"Nice to meet you," Jaime answered. "And what do you do around here?"

"Oh, I am the owner."

Jaime suddenly realized that this casual, humble conversation was his introduction to one of the richest men in the world.

In this day of self-glorification and the celebration of "me," this little story can serve as a reminder of Paul's important words in the book of Philippians: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit" (2:3). People who turn their attention to others and not on themselves have the characteristics Paul mentions.

When we "value others above [ourselves]," we demonstrate Christlike humility (v. 3). We mirror Jesus, who came not "to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45). When we take "the very nature of a servant" (Phil. 2:7), we have the mindset of Jesus (v. 5).

As we interact with others today, let's not look on our own interests alone but also "to the interests of the others" (v. 4).

By: Dave Branon

Reflect & Pray

Jesus, You gave us the model of humility when You left heaven's splendors to become a humble servant on earth. Help us practice Christlike humility in everything we do.

Serve God by serving others.

Truly Humble, Truly Great
Wednesday September 23, 2020

[Christ Jesus] made himself nothing.

Philippians 2:7

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Philippians 2:1–11

As the American Revolution concluded with England's improbable surrender, many politicians and military leaders maneuvered to make General George Washington a new monarch. The world watched, wondering if Washington would stick to his ideals of freedom and liberty when absolute power was within his grasp. England's King George III saw another reality, however. He was convinced that if Washington resisted the power pull and returned to his Virginia farm, he would be "the greatest man in the world." The king knew that the greatness evidenced in resisting the allure to power is a sign of true nobility and significance.

Paul knew this same truth and encouraged us to follow Christ's humble way. Even though Jesus was "in very nature God," he "did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage" (Philippians 2:6). Instead, He surrendered His power, became "a servant" and "humbled himself by becoming obedient to death" (vv. 7–8). The One who held all power surrendered every bit of it for the sake of love.

And yet, in the ultimate reversal, God exalted Christ from a criminal's cross "to the highest place" (v. 9). Jesus, who could demand our praise or force us to be obedient, laid down His power in a breathtaking act that won our worship and devotion. Through absolute humility, Jesus demonstrated true greatness, turning the world upside down.

By: Winn Collier

Reflect & Pray

How does the depth of Jesus' humility surprise you? How does His humility force you to reconsider your definition of greatness?

Thank You, Jesus, that in Your most destitute and (seemingly) disgraceful moment, You demonstrated Your true power and greatness.

Painting a Portrait

Thursday September 24, 2020

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

Philippians 2:5

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Philippians 2:1–11

The National Portrait Gallery in London, England, houses a treasure of paintings from across the centuries, including 166 images of Winston Churchill, 94 of William Shakespeare, and 20 of George Washington. With the older portraits, we may wonder: *Is that what these individuals really looked like?*

For instance, there are eight paintings of Scottish patriot William Wallace (c. 1270–1305), but we obviously don't have photographs to compare them to. How do we know if the artists accurately represented Wallace?

Something similar might be happening with the likeness of Jesus. Without realizing it, those who believe in Him are leaving an impression of Him on others. Not with brushes and oils, but with attitudes, actions, and relationships.

Are we painting a portrait that represents the likeness of His heart? This was the concern of the apostle Paul. "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus," he wrote (Phil. 2:5). With a desire to accurately represent our Lord, he urged His followers to reflect the humility, self-sacrifice, and compassion of Jesus for others.

It has been said, "We are the only Jesus some people will ever see." As we "in humility value others above [ourselves]" (v. 3), we will show the world the heart and attitude of Jesus Himself.

By: Bill Crowder

Reflect & Pray

Father, please build the heart of Christ into my heart that those around me will see Him clearly and desire to know Him too.

How can you show Christ in your life to others in your community?

Christ's sacrifice of Himself motivates us to sacrifice ourselves for others.

Who Cares?
Friday September 25, 2020

I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely
care for your state. —
Philippians 2:20

Today's Scripture:

Philippians 2:12-24

A political leader, summing up the brokenness
of our time, talked about a “Humpty-Dumpty
world.” The intriguing phrase takes us back to a
childhood nursery rhyme:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall;

Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.

All the king's horses and all the king's men

couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again.

The message of that old rhyme is true to life.
Man is broken and needs to be put together
again. The Creator of the universe cares about
our situation and has taken steps to restore us
to wholeness. He came into the world in the
person of Jesus Christ, and He fashioned the
church as His body so that the members should
“care for one another” (1 Corinthians 12:25).
Timothy demonstrated that kind of care for
Paul, and for other believers (Philippians 2:18-
22).

Caring is as basic as giving money to help
destitute Christians or looking after aged
parents; as simple as being patient and kind or
visiting widows and orphans in distress; as
obvious as paying a just wage to employees; or
as unspectacular as giving a cup of cool water
to someone who thirsts. That's how our Savior
would have us care for broken people in our
Humpty-Dumpty world.

Are we letting Jesus care through
us? By: Haddon W. Robinson

Reflect & Pray

**A gentle word, a kindly deed
To help the ones who have a need,
A smile that Christ's great love imparts—
Such caring stands to win their hearts. —
Brandt**

If you really care, you'll want to share.

Connecting to Worship, September 27

Theme: Whom Shall I Love and Whom Shall I
Fear?, Philippians 2:1-18

Readings: Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32, Psalm 25:1-10,
Philippians 2:1-4, 14-18

Connecting to Worship: October 4

Theme: Bringing the Fruit of His Steadfast Love, Philippians 3:4b-14

Readings: Isaiah 5:1-7, Psalm 80:7-19, Philippians 3:4b-14, Matthew 21:33-46

The Ultimate Good Monday September 28, 2020

I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

Philippians 3:8

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Philippians 3:1–11

As I was growing up in Jamaica, my parents raised my sister and me to be “good people.” In our home, *good* meant obeying our parents, telling the truth, being successful in school and work, and going to church . . . at least Easter and Christmas. I imagine this definition of being a good person is familiar to many people, regardless of culture. In fact, the apostle Paul, in Philippians 3, used his culture’s definition of being good to make a greater point.

Paul, being a devout first-century Jew, followed the letter of the moral law in his culture. He was born into the “right” family, had the “right” education, and practiced the “right” religion. He was the *real deal* in terms of being a good person according to Jewish custom. In verse 4, Paul writes that he could boast in all of his goodness if he wanted to. But, as good as he was, Paul told his readers (and us) that there is something more than being good. He knew that being good, while *good*, was not the same as pleasing God.

Pleasing God, Paul writes in verses 7–8, involves knowing Jesus. Paul considered his own goodness as “garbage” when compared to “the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus.” We are good—and we please God—when our

hope and faith are in Christ alone, not in our goodness.

By: Karen Wolfe

Reflect & Pray

Dear God, as I seek to live a good life, help me remember that knowing Jesus is the way to ultimate goodness.

We are good—and we please God—when our hope and faith are in Christ alone, not in our goodness.

Kangaroos And Emus
Tuesday September 29, 2020

Forgetting those things which are behind . . . I
press toward the goal for the prize of the
upward call of God in Christ Jesus. —

Philippians 3:13-14

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Philippians 3:12-17

Two of Australia's indigenous creatures, kangaroos and emus, have something in common—they seldom move backward. Kangaroos, because of the shape of their body and the length of their strong tail, can bounce along with forward movement, but they cannot shift easily into reverse. Emus can run fast on their strong legs, but the joints in their knees seem to make backward movement difficult. Both animals appear on Australia's coat of arms as a symbol that the nation is to be ever moving forward and making progress.

The apostle Paul called for a similar approach to the life of faith in his letter to the Philippians: "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (3:13-14).

While it is wise to learn from the past, we shouldn't live in the past. We cannot redo or undo the past, but by God's grace we can press forward and serve God faithfully today and in the future. The life of faith is a journey forward as we become like Christ.

By: Bill Crowder

Reflect & Pray

I'm pressing on the upward way,
New heights I'm gaining every day;
Still praying as I'm onward bound,
"Lord, plant my feet on higher ground." —
Oatman

I will go anywhere—provided it is forward.

Press On

Wednesday September 30, 2020

I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:14

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Philippians 3:12–21

One of my favorite television programs is *The Amazing Race*. In this reality show, ten couples are sent to a foreign country where they must race, via trains, buses, cabs, bikes, and feet, from one point to another to get their instructions for the next challenge. The goal is for one couple to get to a designated finishing point before everyone else, and the prize is a million dollars.

The apostle Paul compared the Christian life to a race and admitted that he had not yet arrived at the finish line. “Brothers and sisters,” he said, “I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead. I press on toward the goal to win the prize” (Phil. 3:13–14). Paul did not look back and allow his past failures to weigh him down with guilt, nor did he let his present successes make him complacent. He pressed on toward the goal of becoming more and more like Jesus.

We are running this race too. Despite our past failures or successes, let us keep pressing on toward the ultimate goal of becoming more like Jesus. We are not racing for an earthly prize, but for the ultimate reward of enjoying Him forever.

By: Marvin Williams

Reflect & Pray

Read Philippians 4:11–13. How are we able to press on toward our future hope? Read Hebrews 12:1–2. What are some practical things we must do to continue to press on and persevere?

Never call it quits in pursuing Jesus.

Hold On

Thursday October 1, 2020

Stand firm in the Lord.

Philippians 4:1

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Philippians 3:12–4:1

Tianmen Mountain in Zhangjiajie, China, is considered one of the most beautiful mountains in the world. To view its towering cliffs in all their glorious splendor, you must take the Tianmen Shan cable car, which covers a distance of 7,455 meters (4.5 miles). It's amazing how this cable car can travel such long distances and scale such steep mountains without any motor on the car itself. Yet it moves safely up these spectacular heights by keeping a strong grip on a cable that is moved by a powerful motor.

In our journey of faith, how can we finish the race well and “press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called [us] heavenward in Christ Jesus”? (Phil. 3:14). Like the cable car, we keep a strong grip on Christ, which is what Paul meant when he said “stand firm in the Lord” (4:1). We have no resources of our own. We depend fully on Christ to keep us moving forward. He will take us through the greatest challenges and lead us safely home.

Toward the end of his earthly life, the apostle Paul declared, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7). You can too. Simply keep a strong grip on Christ.

By: Albert Lee

Reflect & Pray

We're grateful, Lord, that while we aim to keep a strong grip on You, You always keep a strong grip on us! You are working in us and giving us what we need to continue trusting You on our faith journey.

Keeping the faith means trusting God to faithfully keep you.

Our Best Defense
Friday October 2, 2020

Be my rock of refuge, a fortress of defense to
save me. —

Psalm 31:2

Today's Scripture:

Psalm 31:1-8

In late January 1956, during the tense days of the Montgomery Boycott, civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. could not sleep. A threatening phone call had terrified him. So he prayed, “I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. But Lord, I must confess that I’m weak now, I’m faltering. I’m losing my courage. Now, I am afraid. . . . The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. . . . I can’t face it alone.”

Dr. King later wrote, “At that moment I experienced the presence of the Divine as I never experienced Him before. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice saying, ‘Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth; and God will be at your side forever.’ Almost at once my fears began to go. My uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything.”

The rest is history. Dr. King wanted to see people of all colors free of the damage done by racism and prejudice.

If we face opposition when we’re trying to do what’s right, we too must cry out to the Lord. He alone is our “rock of refuge, a fortress of defense” (Ps. 31:2). He is our reliable source of strength and protection.

By: David C. Egner

Reflect & Pray

**Lord, help me stand upon Your rock of Truth
And never trust myself to sinking sand;
Whenever I am faced with evil powers,
I’ll call upon Your strong and mighty hand. —**

Hess

*When we trust the power of God, we
experience peace, not panic.*

Connecting to Worship, October 4

Theme: Bringing the Fruit of His Steadfast Love,
Philippians 3:4b-14

Readings: Isaiah 5:1-7, Psalm 80:7-19,
Philippians 3:4b-14, Matthew 21:33-46

Connecting to Worship: October 11

Theme: We Are One in Christ, Philippians 4:4-13

Readings: Isaiah 25:6-9, Psalm 23, Philippians 4:4-13, Matthew 22:1-14

The Trail Of Tears

Monday October 5, 2020

God will wipe away every tear from their eyes;
there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor
crying. —

Revelation 21:4

Today's Scripture:

Revelation 21:1-7

A very severe and tragic event in US history was the forced relocation of thousands of Native Americans in the early 19th century. Native American tribes, who had struck treaties with and fought alongside the burgeoning white population, were driven out of their ancestral lands. In the winter of 1838, thousands of Cherokee were forced to embark on a brutal 1,000-mile march westward known as The Trail of Tears. This injustice resulted in the deaths of thousands of people, many of whom had little or no clothing, shoes, or supplies for such a journey.

The world continues to be filled with injustice, pain, and heartache. And many today may feel as if they are leaving a trail of tears—tears that go unnoticed and grief that is not comforted. But our Lord sees our tears and comforts our weary hearts (2 Cor. 1:3-5). He also declares the hope of a future time not marked by the stains of sin or injustice. In that day and in that place, “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

The God who offers freedom from tears in the future is the only One who can fully comfort our tears now.

By: Bill Crowder

Reflect & Pray

Loving Father, thank You that our hurts and pains matter to You. Thank You for the promise of an eternity without tears and a life forever with You. Amen.

When God permits trials, He also provides comfort.

Thoughts of Joy
Tuesday October 6, 2020

By: Cindy Hess Kasper

Reflect & Pray

What unwelcome thoughts have stubbornly taken residence in my mind and heart? What's one way I can daily fill up my mind with good things?

Guide my thoughts this day, O God, as You hold my heart and life in Your care.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again:

Rejoice!

Philippians 4:4

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Philippians 4:4–9

In *What We Keep*, a collection of interviews by Bill Shapiro, each person tells of a single item that holds such importance and joy that he or she would never part with it.

This caused me to reflect on the possessions that mean the most to me and bring me joy. One is a simple forty-year-old recipe card in my mom's handwriting. Another is one of my grandma's pink teacups. Other people may value treasured memories—a compliment that encouraged them, a grandchild's giggle, or a special insight they gleaned from Scripture.

What we often keep stashed away in our hearts, though, are things that have brought us great unhappiness: Anxiety—hidden, but easily retrieved. Anger—below the surface, but ready to strike. Resentment—silently corroding the core of our thoughts.

The apostle Paul addressed a more positive way to “think” in a letter to the church at Philippi. He encouraged the people of the church to always rejoice, to be gentle, and to bring everything to God in prayer (Philippians 4:4–9).

Paul's uplifting words on what to think about helps us see that it's possible to push out dark thoughts and allow the peace of God to guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (v. 7). It's when the thoughts that fill up our minds are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, and praiseworthy that we keep His peace in our hearts (v. 8).

Whack-a-Mole
Wednesday October 7, 2020

Godliness with contentment is great gain.

1 Timothy 6:6

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Philippians 4:10–20

You might know what it's like. The bills keep arriving after a medical procedure—from the anesthesiologist, the surgeon, the lab, the facility. Jason experienced this after an emergency surgery. He complained, "We owe thousands of dollars after insurance. If only we can get these bills paid, then life will be good and I'll be content! I feel like I'm playing the arcade game Whack-a-Mole"—where plastic moles pop up from their holes, and the player hits them wildly with a mallet.

Life comes at us like that at times. The apostle Paul certainly could relate. He said, "I know what it is to be in need," yet he'd "learned the secret of being content in any and every situation" (Philippians 4:12). His secret? "I can do all this through him who gives me strength" (v. 13). When I was going through a particularly discontented time, I read this on a greeting card: "If it isn't here, where is it?" That was a powerful reminder that if I'm not content here and now, what makes me think I'd be *if only* I were in another situation?

How do we learn to rest in Jesus? Maybe it's a matter of focus. Of enjoying and being thankful for the good. Of learning more about a faithful Father. Of growing in trust and patience. Of recognizing that life is about God and not me. Of asking Him to teach me contentment in Him.

By: Anne Cetas

Reflect & Pray

In what areas of your life do you need to grow in contentment? How might you change your focus?

*God, You are good and all You do is good.
Teach me contentment in You. I want to learn.*

Zax Nature
Thursday October 8, 2020

Let your gentleness be evident to all.

Philippians 4:5

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Philippians 4:1–7

In one of Dr. Seuss' whimsical stories, he tells of a "North-Going Zax and a South-Going Zax" crossing the Prairie of Prax. Upon meeting nose to nose, neither Zax will step aside. The first Zax angrily vows to stay put—even if it makes "the whole world stand still." (Unfazed, the world moves on and builds a highway around them.)

The tale offers an uncomfortably accurate picture of human nature. We possess a reflexive "need" to be right, and we're prone to stubbornly cling to that instinct in rather destructive ways!

Happily for us, God lovingly chooses to soften stubborn human hearts. The apostle Paul knew this, so when two members of the Philippian church were squabbling, he loved them enough to call them out (Philippians 4:2). Then, having earlier instructed the believers to have "the same mindset" of self-giving love as Christ (2:5–8), Paul asked them to "help these women," valued coworkers with him in sharing the gospel (4:3). It seems peacemaking and wise compromise call for team effort.

Of course there are times to take a firm stand, but a Christlike approach will look a lot different than an unyielding Zax! So many things in life aren't worth fighting over. We can bicker with each other over every trivial concern until we destroy ourselves (Galatians 5:15). Or we can swallow our pride, graciously

receive wise counsel, and seek unity with our brothers and sisters.

By: Tim Gustafson

Reflect & Pray

What are the things you're fighting over right now? How could wise friends help you resolve your situation?

Soften my hardened, stubborn heart, loving God, so I can truly live in unity. And help me to be open to wise counsel.

The Secret
Friday October 9, 2020

I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation.

Philippians 4:12

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Philippians 4:10–19

Sometimes I suspect my cat Heathcliff suffers from a bad case of FOMO (fear of missing out). When I come home with groceries, Heathcliff rushes over to inspect the contents. When I'm chopping vegetables, he stands up on his back paws peering at the produce and begging me to share. But when I actually *give* Heathcliff whatever's caught his fancy, he quickly loses interest, walking away with an air of bored resentment.

But it'd be hypocritical for me to be hard on my little buddy. He reflects a bit of my own insatiable hunger for more, my assumption that "now" is never enough.

According to Paul, contentment isn't natural—it's learned (Philippians 4:11). On our own, we desperately pursue whatever we think will satisfy, moving on to the next thing the minute we realize it won't. Other times, our discontent takes the form of anxiously shielding ourselves from any and all suspected threats.

Ironically, sometimes it takes experiencing what we'd feared the most in order to stumble into real joy. Having experienced much of the worst life has to offer, Paul could testify firsthand to "the secret" of true contentment (vv. 11–12)—the mysterious reality that as we lift up to God our longings for wholeness, we experience unexplainable peace (vv. 6–7),

carried ever deeper into the depths of Christ's power, beauty, and grace.

By: Monica La Rose

Reflect & Pray

How have you experienced mysterious peace when you least expected it? What desperate longings or fears might you need to lift up to God?

Father, help me to surrender my attempts to secure my own happiness in exchange for embracing the gift of each moment with You.

Connecting to Worship, October 11

Theme: We Are One in Christ, Philippians 4:4-13

Readings: Isaiah 25:6-9, Psalm 23, Philippians 4:4-13, Matthew 22:1-14

Connecting to Worship: October 18

Theme: Healing for Deep Afflictions, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Readings: Isaiah 45:1-7, Psalm 96: 1-9, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10, Matthew 22:15-22

The Viral Gospel Monday October 12, 2020

The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere.

1 Thessalonians 1:8

Today's Scripture & Insight:

1 Thessalonians 1:1–10

The Viral Texts project at Northeastern University in Boston is studying how printed content in the 1800s spread through newspapers—the social media network of that day. If an article was reprinted 50 times or more, they considered that “viral” for the Industrial Age. Writing in *Smithsonian* magazine, Britt Peterson noted that a nineteenth-century news article describing which followers of Jesus were executed for their faith appeared in at least 110 different publications.

When the apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica, he commended them for their bold and joyful witness to Jesus. “The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere” (1 Thess. 1:8). The message of the gospel went viral through these people whose lives had been transformed by Jesus Christ. In spite of difficulties and persecution, they could not remain silent.

We convey the story of forgiveness and eternal life in Christ through kind hearts, helping hands, and honest words from all of us who know the Lord. The gospel transforms us and the lives of those we meet.

May the message ring out from us for all to hear today! By: David C. McCasland

Reflect & Pray

Lord Jesus, help us to live boldly and tell others about You today.

Share how you have been able to live boldly for the Lord.

*There's no better news than the gospel—
spread the word!*

Building A Bridge
Tuesday October 13, 2020

Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. —

1 Thessalonians 1:8

Today's Scripture & Insight:

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

James Michener's *Centennial* is a fictional account of the history and settlement of the American West. Through the eyes of a French-Canadian trader named Pasquinel, Michener converges the stories of the Arapaho of the Great Plains and the European-based community of St. Louis. As this rugged adventurer moves between the growing clutter of the city and the wide-open spaces of the plains, he becomes a bridge between two drastically different worlds.

Followers of Christ also have the opportunity to build bridges between two very different worlds—those who know and follow Jesus and those who do not know Him. Early Christians in Thessalonica had been building bridges to their idol-worshiping culture, so Paul said of them, “For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place” (1 Thess. 1:8). The bridge they were building had two components: the “word of the Lord” and the example of their faith. It was clear to everyone that they had “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (v.9).

As God declares Himself to those around us by His Word and through our lives, we can become a bridge to those who do not yet know the love of Christ.

By: Bill Crowder

Reflect & Pray

Father, help us live in such a way that others will want to know about Your Son. May we not merely try to do what's “right” but instead live as people forgiven and loved by You.

Live the gospel, and others will listen.

Faith, Love, and Hope
Wednesday October 14, 2020

We always thank God for all of you.

1 Thessalonians 1:2

Today's Scripture & Insight:

1 Thessalonians 1:1–3

For ten years, my Aunt Kathy cared for her father (my grandfather) in her home. She cooked and cleaned for him when he was independent, and then took on the role of nurse when his health declined.

Her service is one modern example of the words of Paul who wrote to the Thessalonians that he thanked God for “your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 1:3).

My aunt served in faith and love. Her daily, consistent care was the result of her belief that God called her to this important work. Her labor was borne out of love for God and her father.

She also endured in hope. My grandfather was a very kind man, but it was difficult to watch him decline. She gave up time with family and friends, and limited travel to care for him. She was able to endure because of the hope that God would strengthen her each day, along with the hope of heaven that awaited my grandfather.

Whether it is caring for a relative, helping a neighbor, or volunteering your time, be encouraged as you do the work God has called you to do. Your labor can be a powerful testimony of faith, hope, and love.

By: Lisa M. Samra

Reflect & Pray

Lord, may I this day have eyes to see others' needs, direction from You on any ways I might help, and the Spirit's power to obey. May I live out the faith, love, and hope You've given to me.

The glory of life is to love, not to be loved; to give, not to get; to serve, not to be served.

Dial 91:1

Thursday October 15, 2020

He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. —

Psalm 91:1

Today's Scripture:

Psalm 91:1-16

Most people know that dialing the numbers 9-1-1 in the United States will get them in touch with emergency help. It's so simple that even preschoolers have saved the lives of family members by using it. Three numbers do it all.

In one case, a woman's car had been hijacked with her and her infant son inside. She dialed 9-1-1 on her cellular phone, but the hijacker was totally unaware of what she had done. With the police dispatcher listening, the young mother cleverly included clues about her location as she talked to the hijacker. Police were able to locate her and her baby and arrest the criminal.

In an emergency, help is as close as three pushes on the phone keypad. Often, though, the situations we face cannot be remedied by human rescuers. Many times our crisis requires divine assistance. When that happens, we can call a different kind of 9-1-1—Psalm 91:1. There we find the help and protection of our Almighty God. This verse reminds us that God is our "shelter" and that we can rest in His shadow.

When we face the crises of life, we often try to survive on our own. We forget that what we need most, God's protection and the comfort of His presence, are available for the asking. The next time spiritual danger strikes, dial Psalm 91:1.

By: Dave Branon

Reflect & Pray

Under His wings, I am safely abiding,
Though the night deepens and tempests are
wild;
Still I can trust Him—I know He will keep me,
He has redeemed me and I am His child. —

Cushing

*We need not fear life's dark shadows when we
abide under the shadow of God's wings.*

Models For Imitation
Friday October 16, 2020

You became followers of us and of the Lord. —

1 Thessalonians 1:6

Today's Scripture:

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Leslie Strobel became a Christian in 1979 and modeled her faith in such a way that it influenced her atheistic husband Lee to begin his own search for God. In his book *The Case for Christ*, he tells of his 2 years of intensive research that finally led him to receive Jesus as his Savior. With a law degree from Yale and an award-winning career in journalism at the *Chicago Tribune*, Lee had the ability to answer tough questions raised by unbelievers and cynics.

The change in his life also influenced their 5-year-old daughter Alison, who said, "Mommy, I want God to do for me what He's done for Daddy." Leslie's faith created a ripple effect that changed the whole family.

This pattern of modeling or imitating is what Paul described in the first chapter of 1 Thessalonians. His example, along with that of Silas and Timothy, motivated the new believers

in Thessalonica to imitate them (the word *followers* carries that idea). Then, as these new believers suffered for Christ with patience and endurance, they in turn became models to believers in Macedonia and Achaia, inspiring them to new levels of devotion.

Our example can be our most persuasive influence for Christ. Do others imitate us because we model Him?

By: Herbert Vander Lugt

Reflect & Pray

**Only one life, so live it well,
And keep your candle trimmed and bright;
Eternity, not time, will tell
The radius of that candle's light. —Miller**

The one who follows Christ leads the way for others.

Connecting to Worship, October 18

Theme: Healing for Deep Afflictions, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Readings: Isaiah 45:1-7, Psalm 96: 1-9, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10, Matthew 22:15-22

Connecting to Worship: October 25

Theme: It Just Takes one Word – No One is Left Out, Revelation 14:6-7

Readings: Revelation 14:6-7, Psalm 46, Romans 3:19-28, John 8:31-36

Standing Tall

Monday October 19, 2020

Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps. —

1 Peter 2:21

Today's Scripture:

1 Peter 2:18-25

It has never been easy to be a slave. In the days of the Roman Empire, slaves were called “human tools.” Old or sick slaves could be thrown aside like a worn-out saw.

Sometimes Christian slaves suffered additional indignities because of the antagonism of their pagan masters. The apostle Peter gave those slaves some challenging instructions. He told them to respond to the injustice of their situation with the dignity Christ displayed. They were to take their lead not from their emotions but from Christ’s example in suffering as He went to the cross (1 Pet. 2:20-24).

There is an old story of a Persian prince with a physical deformity that forced him into a constant stoop. The prince had a statue made of himself as he would appear if he were straight and tall. Day after day he stood before the figure and wished he could be like it. According to the legend, the prince eventually stood as straight as the statue.

That tale captures what it means to follow the example of Jesus. Even as those first-century slaves bent under the weight of their inhumane treatment, they could stand as tall as Christ by following the example of their suffering Savior.

Is some injustice bringing you low? Look to your Master! We can stand tall when we stand with Him. By: Haddon W. Robinson

Reflect & Pray

To earthly wisdom honor is as gold,
The strong will rule—the rest must serve
instead;

But our Example cut a different mold—
He stooped and bathed the feet of men He
led. —Gustafson

*Standing tall for Christ means stooping to help
others.*

The Innocent Man
Tuesday October 20, 2020

Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? —

Genesis 18:25

Today's Scripture:

Genesis 18:22-33

John Grisham is well known for his courtroom novels—fast-paced tales of lawyers and victims, authorities and wrongdoers. However, his book *The Innocent Man* is not fiction. It is a real-life story of injustice. It tells of the brutal murder of a young woman and the two men who, though innocent, were convicted and sentenced to death for the crime. Only with the advent of DNA testing were they proven innocent and spared from execution after 17 years of suffering wrongly. At long last, justice prevailed.

Everyone desires justice. But we must recognize that our human frailty makes it challenging to mete out true justice. And we can be bent toward revenge, making a casualty out of the pursuit of it.

It's helpful to remember that perfect justice can be found only in God. Abraham described Him with the rhetorical question, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). The necessary answer is yes. But even more, His courtroom is the one and only place where we can be certain that justice will prevail.

In a world filled with injustice, we can take the wrongs done to us, submit them to the Judge of all the earth, and trust Him for ultimate justice.

By: **Bill Crowder**

Reflect & Pray

The best of judges on this earth Aren't always right or fair; But God, the Righteous Judge of all, Wrongs no one in His care. —Egner

Life is not always fair, but God is always faithful.

Reformation
Wednesday October 21, 2020

The king stood by a pillar and made a covenant
before the Lord And all the people took a
stand for the covenant. —

2 Kings 23:3

Today's Scripture:

2 Kings 22:11-23:3

In May of 2001, English evangelist J. John spoke in Liverpool, England, on the eighth commandment: "You shall not steal" (Ex. 20:15; Deut. 5:19). The results of his preaching were dramatic.

People's hearts were changed. One author reports that large amounts of stolen goods were returned, including hotel towels, hospital crutches, library books, cash, and more. One man, who is now in the ministry, even returned towels he had taken from the Wimbledon tennis championships years ago when he worked there.

Something similar happened with King Josiah in the 18th year of his reign. Because of the long line of evil kings, the record of God's laws had been lost. So when Hilkiah found God's law and Shaphan read it to King Josiah, the king tore his clothes in grief and immediately began making religious reforms in his own life and throughout the nation. With just one reading of God's Word, he changed the course of the nation (2 Kings 22:8–23:25).

Today, many of us own Bibles, but are we changed by the truths found there? We are called to read, hear, and obey His Word. It should cause us, like Josiah, to take immediate action to bring our lives into harmony with God's desires.

By: Marvin Williams

Reflect & Pray

Thinking It Over

Is it my habit to read God's Word every day?

**How does awareness of sin break my heart,
as it did for King Josiah?**

*Open your Bible prayerfully; read it carefully;
obey it joyfully.*

A Woman Of Influence
Thursday October 22, 2020

She watches over the ways of her household,
and does not eat the bread of idleness. —

Proverbs 31:27

Today's Scripture:

Proverbs 31:10-31

During the early years of the Protestant Reformation in Europe, Katharina Von Bora, a former nun, married Martin Luther (1525). By all accounts, the two had a joyous married life. Luther said, “There is no bond on earth so sweet, nor any separation so bitter, as that which occurs in a good marriage.”

Because Katharina rose at 4 a.m. to care for her responsibilities, Luther referred to her as the “morning star of Wittenberg.” She was industrious in tending the vegetable garden and orchard. Also, she administered the family business and managed the Luthers’ home and property. In time, the couple had six children for whom Katharina felt the home was a school of character development. Her energetic industry and care for the family made her a woman of influence.

Katharina seems to have been a woman like the one described in Proverbs 31. She was indeed a virtuous wife who awoke “while it [was] yet night” and provided “food for her household” (v.15). She also watched “over the ways of her household, and [did] not eat the bread of idleness” (v.27).

From role models like Katharina, we can learn about the love, diligence, and fear of the Lord that’s needed to be a woman of influence.

By: Dennis Fisher

Reflect & Pray

Lord, thank You for the influence our mothers
and wives
have had on us. We too want to touch the lives
of
others, to point them to You. We know we
need Your
Spirit’s power to do that. Fill us and use us, we
pray.

Good mothers not only tell us how to live—
they show us.

Let's Go Fishing!
Friday October 23, 2020

[Jesus] said to them, "Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." —

Mark 6:31

Today's Scripture:

Mark 6:7-13,30-31

Philip Melancthon, the great Reformation theologian, once said to his friend Martin Luther, "This day you and I will discuss the governance of the universe." What Luther said in response was unexpected: "This day you and I will go fishing and leave the governance of the universe to God."

Dr. M. R. De Haan, the founder of Radio Bible Class, always carried the responsibility of leadership with a conscientious seriousness of purpose. His ministry of speaking, writing, and broadcasting touched the lives of millions. Yet he also loved taking time out to "wet a line," and he did it often enough to balance out the responsibilities of his work.

If we are going to serve Christ effectively, we need balance in our lives. We cannot go full speed in the work of the Lord for too long without rest or diversion. We have to counterbalance the seriousness of our mission with good relaxation.

It's important to be diligent in our work for the Lord. But sometimes we get so engrossed in our tasks and activities that we become exhausted and begin to lose perspective. We need to rest, as our Lord advised the disciples. We just may have to say, "Let's go fishing!"

By: **David C. Egner**

Reflect & Pray

**Once my hands were always trying,
Trying hard to do my best;
Now my heart is sweetly trusting,
And my soul is all at rest. —Simpson**

*Come apart and rest awhile, or you may just
plain come apart. —Havner*

Connecting to Worship, October 25

Theme: It Just Takes one Word – No One is Left Out, Revelation 14:6-7

Readings: Revelation 14:6-7, Psalm 46, Romans 3:19-28, John 8:31-36

Connecting to Worship: November 1

Theme: Reconciliation Out of Tribulation, Revelation 7:1-17

Readings: Revelation 7:9-17, Psalm 149. 1 John 3:1-3, Matthew 5:1-12

The Brightest Hope Monday October 26, 2020

future and gives strength for today.

By: Haddon W. Robinson

God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

—
Revelation 7:17

Today's Scripture:

Revelation 7:9-17

In the comic strip BC, a cave man stood before a rock labeled “Exchanges.” He complained to the person in charge of exchanges, “My calendar watch won’t budge.” The other man replied, “I don’t wonder. I’m not too choked up about moving into the next year myself.”

We can all understand his pessimistic outlook. Tomorrow often does look dark. But the real question is: “What lies beyond midnight?”

John, the writer of Revelation, was in exile on the Island of Patmos. He wrote to people threatened with persecution for their faith. They probably weren’t too eager to move into the future.

To help them, and us, face what lies ahead, John painted a picture of our ultimate future. In the presence of God, Christians will “neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat” (Rev. 7:16). And “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (v.17). What comfort that holds for us!

Someone has noted, “The only thing we know about the future is that the providence of God will be up before dawn.” As we face what lies ahead, we can count on that. Hope in the God of all our tomorrows provides optimism for the

Reflect & Pray

Children of yesterday, heirs of tomorrow,
Look at your fabric of labor and sorrow;
Seamy and dark with despair and disaster,
Turn it, and—lo! The design of the Master. —
Lathbury

*Even in the bleakest times, Christians have the
brightest hope.*

The Gathering
Tuesday October 27, 2020

The Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will
shepherd [us] and lead [us] to living fountains
of waters. —

Revelation 7:17

Today's Scripture:

Revelation 7:9-17

During Oswald Chambers' service as a YMCA chaplain in Egypt (1915–1917), he touched the lives of many soldiers who died in World War I. On November 6, 1916, Chambers wrote in his diary: "We have a letter from a New Zealand friend telling us that Ted Strack has been killed. And so Ted Strack has 'gone to be with Jesus.' That is just how he would have put it [He] was a rough beauty of nature and of grace, a fearless, loveable little saint. Thank God for every remembrance of him So they are gathering one by one."

As we grieve the death of those we love, we cling to Jesus' promise of life beyond the grave. The book of Revelation records John's vision of a great multitude from every nation, tribe, and language gathered around God's throne in heaven (7:9). The overarching truth of this passage is a glad, eternal reunion when "the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd [us] and lead [us] to living fountains of waters" (v.17).

The passing of every believer in Christ foreshadows the day when we will join them with the Lord. In our sadness today, we are hopeful as we see that "they are gathering one by one."

By: **David C. McCasland**

The Lamb Is Our Shepherd
Wednesday October 28, 2020

The Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. —

Revelation 7:17

Today's Scripture:

Revelation 7:13-17

The book of Revelation gives us a marvelous picture. The Lamb of God leads us from one fountain of water to another, always deeper into the love of God (7:17).

Jesus prayed in the Upper Room shortly before He went to the cross: “I have declared to [the disciples] Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:26).

Jesus leads us into an ever deeper knowledge of the love of God. His concern is not merely that we know about God, but that we know how deeply we’re cherished and loved. As Jesus said, the love the Father has for the Son He also has for us.

But it’s a process to comprehend that love. It takes time for God’s love to take hold of us. Perhaps you’re not sure that He loves you. Be patient. The Holy Spirit is at work guiding you into all truth (John 16:13). Read and meditate on His words and deeds in the Gospels. Ask Him to show you God’s love. In time He will reveal its “width and length and depth and height” (Ephesians 3:18).

And if I understand it correctly, the process will go on throughout eternity. We will be completely satisfied in heaven, and yet we will continue growing, for there is no end to the love of God.

By: David H. Roper

All Safe! All Well!
Thursday October 29, 2020

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for
and assurance about what we do not see.

Hebrews 11:1

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Hebrews 11:8-16

In January 1915, the ship *Endurance* was trapped and crushed in the ice off the coast of Antarctica. The group of polar explorers, led by Ernest Shackleton, survived and managed to reach Elephant Island in three small lifeboats. Trapped on this uninhabited island, far from normal shipping lanes, they had one hope. On April 24, 1916, 22 men watched as Shackleton and five comrades set out in a tiny lifeboat for South Georgia, an island 800 miles away. The odds seemed impossible, and if they failed, they would all certainly die. What joy, then, when more than *four months* later a boat appeared on the horizon with Shackleton on its bow shouting, "Are you all well?" And the call came back, "All safe! All well!"

What held those men together and kept them alive over those months? Faith and hope placed in one man. They believed that Shackleton would find a way to save them.

This human example of faith and hope echoes the faith of the heroes listed in Hebrews 11. Their faith in the "substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" kept them going through great difficulties and trials (Heb. 11:1 nkjv).

As we look out upon the horizon of our own problems, may we not despair. May we have hope through the certainty of our faith in the One Man—Jesus, our God and Savior.

By: Randy Kilgore

Reflect & Pray

Thank You, Father, for the promise of forgiveness made possible by Jesus. May that promise lighten the darkest of our days.

The hope of Jesus shines brightly even on our darkest day.

Saints

Friday October 30, 2020

To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ
who are in Colosse —

Colossians 1:2

Today's Scripture:

Colossians 1:1-2

It's probably not a name we would use for ourselves, but the apostle Paul often called believers "saints" in the New Testament (Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:2). Did he call them saints because they were perfect? No. These people were human and therefore sinful. What then did he have in mind? The word *saint* in the New Testament means that one is set apart for God. It describes people who have a spiritual union with Christ (Eph. 1:3-6). The word is synonymous with individual believers in Jesus (Rom. 8:27) and those who make up the church (Acts 9:32).

Saints have a responsibility through the power of the Spirit to live lives worthy of their calling. This includes, but is not limited to, no longer being sexually immoral and using improper speech (Eph. 5:3-4). We are to put on the new character traits of service to one another (Rom. 16:2), humility, gentleness, patience, love, unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:1-3), obedience, and perseverance during hardship and suffering (Rev. 13:10; 14:12). In the Old Testament, the psalmist called saints "the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight" (Ps. 16:3).

Our union with Christ makes us saints, but our obedience to God's Word through the power of the Holy Spirit makes us saintly.

By: Marvin Williams

Reflect & Pray

Oh, to be filled with His life divine, Oh, to be
clothed with His power and might; Oh, to
reflect my dear Savior sublime, Always to shine
as the saints in light! —Anon.

Saints are people whom God's light shines
through.

Connecting to Worship, November 1

Theme: Reconciliation Out of Tribulation,
Revelation 7:1-17

Readings: Revelation 7:9-17, Psalm 149. 1 John
3:1-3, Matthew 5:1-12