



Our Daily Bread

SPECIAL EDITION



Food for
the Soul

FOR PERSONAL and FAMILY DEVOTIONS. SINCE 1956



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Butterfly at Meijer Garden, Michigan, USA © Alex Soh

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Soul Hunger

Blaise Pascal, the 17th-century French mathematician and philosopher, said there's a God-shaped vacuum in every human heart. Centuries before Pascal, a man named Augustine searched to fill the aching void in his own life. After he found what he had been missing, he wrote a prayer in which he said to God, "You have made us for Yourself, and our heart is restless until we find our rest in You" (*Confessions*).

Those two thinkers have expressed what each one of us realizes in our quiet, reflective moments. Deep within us is a restless desire to know the One who made us. We want to discover the purpose He has for our existence in His vast universe. We long to find peace in a world that is being torn apart by feuding families, warring nations, militant religious groups, economic uncertainty, and self-destructive addictions.

At times we may try to suppress that longing. We may try to fill the emptiness with a busy life, community service, career pursuits, romantic relationships, or by trying to cover up the ache with drugs or alcohol. Even though we may try to suppress or deny that longing within us, it will surface again and again.

That's why we have produced this booklet. Within its pages are 4 weeks of daily readings that are designed to help you discover the joy of a personal relationship with God. Those answers come from a Book that God has given to us—the

**You have made us
for Yourself, and
our heart is restless
until we find our
rest in You.**

—Augustine

Bible. As you use this booklet each day, you will be encouraged to find out for yourself what the Bible has to say about God and the practical issues of your life.

So please read this entire booklet. It will provide you with food for the soul. The brief daily articles will guide you through a variety of topics, and the special weekend pages will provide thought-provoking insights about finding satisfaction for your heart and mind. It is our prayer that the following pages will speak directly to the deepest concerns of your life, helping to point you to the only eternally satisfying answer to the longing of your heart.

So turn the page, and begin to feed your soul. 🌿

To Have One, Be One

All of us need at least one or two close friends. A small boy defined a friend as someone who knows all about you and likes you just the same. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “A friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature.” Henry Durbanville made this observation about friendship: “A friend is the first person to come in when the whole world goes out.”

Solomon wrote in Proverbs 17:17, “A friend loves at all times.” We can’t improve on that definition. To have someone who remains true to us under all circumstances is one of life’s choicest blessings. The support and encouragement that only a close friend can offer is sorely needed when the burdens of life weigh heavily upon us. Jesus, of course, is the ultimate friend, for He laid down His life for His friends (JOHN 15:13).

Proverbs 18:24 makes an important point and takes us beyond a description of what it means to be a friend. It says that “a man who has friends must himself be friendly.” The implication is clear: Friendliness must begin with us. We must take the initiative in developing relationships with others. Let us be to others what we desire for ourselves. When it comes to friends, to have one you must be one! 🌱

TODAY’S READING**John 15:9-17**


A man who has friends must himself be friendly.

Proverbs 18:24

RICHARD DEHAAN

I went outside to find a friend
But could not find one there;
I went outside to be a friend,
And friends were everywhere! ANON.

Friends are seldom found; they are made.

 ⁹As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. ¹⁰If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. ¹¹These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. ¹²This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. ¹⁴You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. ¹⁵No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. ¹⁷These things I command you, that you love one another.

Jesus spoke these words at the Last Supper, in the upper room with His disciples—knowing that the next day He would go to the cross. This adds an important background to His call for obedience, because Philippians 2:8 reads, “He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” As Jesus calls us to obedience, He fully understands what that could cost. He knew that doing the will of His Father would result in His sacrificial death on the cross, but He obeyed anyway.

INSIGHT

How Can I Forgive?

Some of life's hurts are so deep and painful that to forgive the people who caused them seems impossible. Yet Jesus says that we can't experience His forgiveness if we have an unforgiving spirit.

In World War II, Corrie Ten Boom and her sister Betsie were arrested for concealing Jews and were sent to a German concentration camp. Betsie died a slow and terrible death as a result of the cruel treatment.

Then, in 1947, Corrie spoke about God's forgiveness to a church in Munich. Afterward, a man sought her out. She recognized him as one of the guards who had mistreated her and Betsie. He told her that he had become a Christian, and with extended hand he asked for her forgiveness. Corrie struggled with her feelings, but when she recalled the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:15, she knew she had to forgive. She silently prayed, "Jesus, help me!" and thrust her hand into the hand of her former tormentor.

Someone has said, "Forgiveness is not a case of 'holy amnesia' that wipes out the past. Instead, it is the experience of healing that drains the poison from the wound." God asks us to do for others what He has done for us through Jesus Christ. He'll give us strength to forgive. 🌿

DENNIS DEHAAN

TODAY'S READING
Matthew 18:21-35

**If you do not
forgive men
their trespasses,
neither will your
Father forgive your
trespasses.**

Matthew 6:15

Lord Jesus, give us grace each day
That we may follow in Your way,
Especially when some unloved soul
Needs our forgiving to be whole. D. DEHAAN

Since we all need forgiveness, we should always be forgiving.

²¹Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” ²²Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

²³Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. ²⁶The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ ²⁷Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. ²⁸But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’ ²⁹So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ ³⁰And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. ³¹So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. ³²Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. ³³Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’ ³⁴And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. ³⁵So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”

He Knows Your Name

How many stars are there? Astronomers don't know. They simply assure us that the cosmos contains more stars than can be numbered. Billions for sure—probably trillions!

Figures like that are hard for us to grasp. Even a million is mind-boggling. If you were counting a million \$1 bills at the rate of 60 a minute for 8 hours a day, 5 days a week, it would take you nearly 7 weeks to complete the task. At the same rate it would take over 133 years to count a billion dollars.

Scripture declares that God, the Maker of the sun and moon, “made the stars also” (GENESIS 1:16). It likewise declares that He “brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, by the greatness of His might and the strength of His power; not one is missing” (ISAIAH 40:26).

So if we ever wonder whether God is able to carry us with all our burdens, let us remember that He is the sovereign of the stars. Surely He who is the guide of the galaxies can deal with our situations.

If the skies are clear tonight, look heavenward and be thankful that the God who calls each star by name knows, loves, and cares for you. 🌿

TODAY'S READING**Psalm 147:1-9**

**He heals the
brokenhearted
... He counts the
number of the
stars; He calls them
all by name.** vv. 3-4

I sing the wisdom that ordained
The sun to rule by day;
The moon shines full at His command,
And all the stars obey. WATTS

The One who upholds the universe will never let you down.

P¹Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and praise is beautiful. ²The LORD builds up Jerusalem; He gathers together the outcasts of Israel. ³He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. ⁴He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name. ⁵Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite. ⁶The LORD lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked down to the ground. ⁷Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praises on the harp to our God, ⁸who covers the heavens with clouds, who prepares rain for the earth, who makes grass to grow on the mountains. ⁹He gives to the beast its food, and to the young ravens that cry.

Psalm 147:1-9 contains several contrasts. It describes not only the vastness of God's ability, but also the intimacy of His care. The Lord not only is concerned about nations (v.2), but He also cares for brokenhearted individuals and their very personal wounds (v.3). He covers the heavens with clouds (v.8), yet He is concerned for the smallest elements of His creation (v.9). How encouraging to know that the Creator of the universe and the Ruler of all nations cares so much about us!

INSIGHT

The Star In The Window

During World War II it was the custom in the United States for a family who had a son serving in the military to place a star in the front window of their home. But a gold star indicated that the son had died in support of his country's cause.

Years ago, Sir Harry Lauder told a touching story about this custom. He said that one night a man was walking down a New York City street accompanied by his 5-year-old son. The little fellow was interested in the brightly lighted windows of the houses and wanted to know why some houses had a star in the window. The father explained that those families had a son fighting in the war. The child would clap his hands as he saw another star in the window and would cry out, "Look, Daddy, there's another family who gave a son for his country."

At last they came to an empty lot, and a break in the row of houses. Through the gap a star could be seen shining brightly in the sky. The little lad caught his breath, "Oh, Daddy," he cried, "Look at the star in the window of heaven! God must have given His Son too."

Yes, there is a star in God's window. Do you realize what He did for you? Out of His love for us, He gave His Son (EPHESIANS 2:4). Have you thanked Him? 🌿

M.R. DEHAAN

For God so loved the world, He gave His only Son
To die on Calvary's tree, from sin to set me free;
Someday He's coming back, what glory that will be!
Wonderful His love to me. TOWNSEND

Many give their lives for their country, but Jesus gave His life for the world.

¹And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ²in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. ⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹not of works, lest anyone should boast. ¹⁰For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:8 tells us that being saved is a result of “grace.” In the Bible, that word means “undeserved favor”—a gift that cannot be worked for or earned. We may think that we must do religious things in order to please God. This passage makes it clear, however, that we cannot earn salvation by our efforts. Forgiveness of sins and eternal life is a gracious gift from God—made possible through the kindness shown to us in Jesus Christ (v.7).

INSIGHT

How To Know There's A God

An atheist said to a Christian, “Have you ever seen God? Have you ever felt God? Have you ever smelled God? And you say you have a God!”

After a long pause, the Christian replied, “Have you ever seen your brains? Have you ever felt your brains? Have you ever smelled your brains? And you say you have brains!”

There probably are very few atheists—those who have seriously thought about life and concluded that there is no God. There are more agnostics—thinking people who say, “I don’t know.” The vast majority of individuals, however, affirm—at least intellectually—that God exists.

Hebrews 11:6 tells us that recognizing God’s existence is the first step to knowing Him personally. Then we must seek Him and believe that He will reward our quest to know Him.

Our search will ultimately lead us to consider Jesus. He declared, “I and My Father are one” (JOHN 10:30). He also said that the person who desires to obey God will recognize that He, Jesus, spoke the truth (JOHN 7:17).

You or someone you know may be at step one: recognizing that God exists. Remember, the Lord rewards those who earnestly seek to know Him. And a personal relationship with Him comes only through faith in Christ. 🌿

DENNIS DEHAAN

TODAY'S READING Hebrews 11:1-7

He who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. v. 6

I searched with all my heart to know
If God was really there;
He graciously revealed Himself—
His mercy, love, and care. CETAS

If you're looking for God, you'll find Him in Christ.

¹Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. ²For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. ³By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. ⁴By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks. ⁵By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, and was not found, because God had taken him; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. ⁶But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. ⁷By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

This portion of the Bible talks about real faith, and that is a vital issue. We often hear people speak about faith, but we aren't able to clearly understand what their faith is in. We cannot merely have "faith in faith"—a positive outlook that just believes everything will somehow work out. There must be an object that we place our faith in, and Hebrews 11 urges us to understand that faith becomes meaningful only when our faith is in the true and living God.

INSIGHT



10 Reasons To Believe In The Existence Of God

1. The Inevitability Of Faith. Everyone believes in something. Atheists cannot prove there is no God. Faith is unavoidable, even if we choose to believe only in ourselves.

2. The Limitations Of Science. The scientific method is limited to that which is measurable and repeatable. By definition, it cannot speak to issues of ultimate origin, meaning, or morality. Science by itself offers no moral guidance or values to govern our lives. All science can do is show us how natural law works, while telling us nothing about its origins.

3. The Problems Of Evolution. An evolutionary explanation of life would not make God unnecessary. Even if we assume that scientists will someday find enough “missing links” to confirm that life appeared and developed gradually over great periods of time, laws of probability would still show the need for a Creator. The universe in all of its immensity and complexity did not “just happen.” Many

evolutionist scientists are compelled to acknowledge the possibility or even likelihood of an intelligent Designer.

4. The Habits Of The Heart. Mankind has been described as incurably religious. In unguarded moments of trouble or surprise, in prayer or in profanity, references to deity persist. Denying the existence of God does not eliminate the persistent longing for more than this life has to offer (ECCLESIASTES 3:11). Even in our anger with a God who would permit injustice and pain, we draw upon a moral conscience to argue that life is not as it ought to be (ROMANS 2:14-15). We are drawn to something that is more rather than less than ourselves.

5. The Background Of Genesis. The opening words of the Bible, “In the beginning God” (GENESIS 1:1), assume the existence of God. Genesis was written at a point of time in history. Israel’s exodus from Egypt and the miraculous events have been witnessed by millions of Jews and Egyptians. From the Exodus to the coming of Messiah, the God of the Bible rests His case on events witnessed in real time and locations. Anyone who doubted the claims could visit real places and people to check out the evidence for themselves.

6. The Nation Of Israel. Many find it difficult to believe in a God who would be partial to Israel, His “chosen people.” It is even harder to believe in a God who would not protect His “chosen nation” from the horrors of World War II. Yet from the beginning of Old Testament history, Israel’s future was prewritten. Together with other prophets, Moses predicted not only Israel’s possession of the land but also her unparalleled suffering and dispersion throughout the whole earth, her eventual repentance, and then finally her last days restoration (DEUTERONOMY 28–34 ; ISAIAH 2:1-5; EZEKIEL 37–38).

7. The Claims Of Christ. Some say, “If God wanted us to believe in Him, He would appear to us.” According to the Bible, that is what God has done. God has come in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “I and the Father are one” (JOHN 10:30). “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (JOHN 14:9).

8. The Evidence Of Miracles. If the Red Sea did not part as Moses said it did, the Old Testament loses its authority to speak on behalf of God. The miracles that Jesus performed, His death on the cross, and His resurrection 3 days later proved that Jesus is who He claimed to be: the Messiah.

9. The Details Of Nature. There are people who reason that a God great enough to create the universe would be too big to be concerned about us. Jesus, however, showed that God is great enough to care about the smallest details of our lives. God not only knows every move we make but also the motives and thoughts of our heart. God knows the number of hairs on our head, the concerns of our heart, and even the condition of a fallen sparrow (PSALM 139; MATTHEW 10:29).

10. The Voice Of Experience. The Bible says that God designs the circumstances of our lives in a way that will prompt us to look for Him (ACTS 17:26-27). For those who reach out for Him, the Scriptures also say that He is close enough to be found (ACTS 17:27-28). The Bible makes it just as clear, however, that we must reach out for God on His terms rather than our own. He promises to be found, not by just anyone but by those who admit their own need and are willing to trust Him rather than themselves.

You're Not Alone. You're not alone if you are open to the existence of God but aren't sure you can accept Jesus' claim to be "God in the flesh." The teacher from Nazareth promised to help those who want to know and please God. He said, "If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own" (JOHN 7:17 NIV).

If you do see the evidence for the God who revealed Himself to us through His Son, then keep in mind that the Bible says Christ died to pay the price for our sins, and that all who believe in Him will receive the gifts of forgiveness and everlasting life. The salvation Christ offers is not a reward for effort but a gift to all who in light of the evidence put their trust in Him (JOHN 5:24; ROMANS 4:5; EPHESIANS 2:8-10). 🌿

Kindness Can't Wait

You know those thoughtful words you want to say to someone who has been especially nice? Or that encouraging note you plan to write to a friend who seems a little down? You might want to do those acts of kindness now, because you never know when it might be too late.

As we think about taking action on our kind intentions, we can learn from Charles R. Haynsworth Jr., a businessman who encouraged his employees—just in time.

Although Mr. Haynsworth did not normally sign his workers' paychecks, he did so in September 1994. The regular signatories were out of the office, so he took over the task. When he signed the checks, Mr. Haynsworth took the extra effort to attach a note to each check, expressing thanks to his employees for their service.

The next day Charles Haynsworth died unexpectedly, but not before he had personally given a final word of thanks in those notes to everyone on his staff.

One of the best evidences of our faith in Christ is our kindness to others (JOHN 13:35; ROMANS 12:10). Take the time today to write a note of appreciation or to do a special kindness for someone you love. Don't wait until it's too late to be kind. 🙌

DAVE BRANON

Let us be Christ's true disciples,
Looking to another's need,
Making stony pathways smoother
By a gentle word or deed. THORSON

It's never too soon to be kind, but it can be too late.

⁹Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. ¹⁰Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; ¹¹not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹²rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; ¹³distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. ¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

Life is all about our relationships with God and with others. In the segment above from Romans 12, Paul describes ways that a Christian's relationship with God is to affect his relationships with others. Notice the themes Paul urges us to consider in our relationships: integrity (v.9), humility (v.10), generosity (v.13), love for our enemies (v.14), empathy (v.15), openness to others and their concerns (v.16). Practiced consistently, these principles can be the backbone of healthy relationships.

INSIGHT

Love Hurts!

“**S**ometimes love sure hurts!” The mother and father were expressing the difficulties and heartaches of guiding their children through their teen years. “Maybe if we didn’t love them quite so much it wouldn’t be so hard,” the man added.

Even though love brings pain and sorrow, what would life be without it? In his book *The Four Loves*, C. S. Lewis wrote:

“To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully around with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness . . . The only place outside heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers . . . of love is hell.”

To love is to take risks, to expose our hearts. Sometimes it hurts! It hurt Jesus Christ, but He kept on loving—even at the cost of His life. And He asked us to “love one another as I have loved you” (JOHN 15:12).

Truly loving that spouse, that teenager, that neighbor, that colleague is Christlike, and it’s better than locking your heart in the coffin of self-centeredness. 🌱

DAVE EGNER


TODAY’S READING

1 John 4:7-16

This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. John 15:12

How have you been hurt by those you’ve tried to love?
Have you been tempted to withhold your love from them as a result?

Nothing costs as much as loving—except not loving.

 ⁷Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. ¹³By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. ¹⁴And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. ¹⁵Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

In verse 10, we see the word *propitiation*.

This is a key word in theology to describe what Christ did on the cross. It means that He satisfied God's justifiable anger at human sin. This tells us how deeply we are loved by Christ, that He would take all of God's anger at our sin, so that we can be free to experience God's great and awesome love.

INSIGHT

What You Don't Know

Do you know an *aglet* from a *tang*? Would you recognize *duff* if you walked on it?

It's not essential to know these terms to make it through life successfully. If you didn't know that an *aglet* is "the covering on the end of a shoelace," that a *tang* is "the projecting prong on a tool," or that *duff* is "the decaying matter found on a forest floor," it's not all that important. You could always look it up.

We can be glad we don't have to know everything to get by in this world.

We often can depend on someone else's knowledge. For instance, I don't know how to fix the brakes of my car—but as long as someone else knows and can fix them, I'm okay.

There is a knowledge, however, for which we are individually responsible if we expect to enter heaven. I'm talking about knowing Christ personally. Learning about Him and entering into a personal relationship with Him is the only way to live wisely and be prepared to meet God. The apostle Paul had this in mind when he said, "I know whom I have believed" (2 TIMOTHY 1:12).

Do you know the One who died for you and can forgive your sins? Unless you know Him, all other knowledge is insignificant. 🌿

DAVE BRANON

TODAY'S READING

2 Timothy 1:8-14

**I know whom I
have believed.** v. 12

Eternal life is knowing God
Through Jesus Christ His only Son;
Such knowledge is life's greatest quest —
Without it life has not begun. D. DEHAAN

To know Christ is the greatest of all knowledge.

⁸Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, ⁹who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, ¹⁰but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, ¹¹to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. ¹²For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day. ¹³Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

As Paul writes these powerful words, he is in prison facing execution for the crime of preaching Christ. Notice, however, that this has not produced bitterness in him but concern. He is concerned for his young protégé, Timothy, that he remain faithful, true to the message, and committed to the Lord. He is so settled in his trust in God that even as he is facing death, his concern is for others and not himself.

INSIGHT

Life's Final Deadline

We're all confronted with deadlines! Bills must be paid, licenses renewed, tax returns filed—the list goes on and on.

One deadline we all face is of supreme importance, however. The Bible says, “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment”

(HEBREWS 9:27).

Except for believers who are living when Jesus returns (1 THESSALONIANS 4:16-17), everyone will die. And all people from the beginning of history will stand before God in judgment. How foolish to neglect the preparation necessary for this inevitable accounting!

In Luke 12, Jesus told a parable of a rich man who planned to build bigger barns to store all his earthly goods so that he could live out his days in pleasure and ease. But God unexpectedly announced, “Fool! This night your soul will be required of you” (LUKE 12:20). His ultimate deadline had arrived.

Are you ready to meet God? If you've never received Christ as your personal Savior, do so without delay! Believe that He shed His blood on the cross to forgive your sins, and that He conquered death by rising from the grave. Ask Him to save you. Then you can face life's final deadline with confidence. 🙏

TODAY'S READING


Luke 12:16-21

**Prepare to meet
your God.** Amos 4:12

RICHARD DEHAAN

Life is uncertain,
Death is sure;
Sin the cause,
Christ the cure. ANON.

Don't wait till the 11th hour to repent—you may die at 10:30!

 ¹⁶Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. ¹⁷And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ ¹⁸So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.”’ ²⁰But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ ²¹So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

When Jesus taught, He often used parables

(as here in Luke 12). It has been said that a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. In telling these stories, Jesus drew from situations that His listeners would easily identify with as part of life in their ancient agricultural world. These parables have a continuing significance today, even in our modern technological world, because the principles that they convey are timeless.

INSIGHT

The Needed Antenna

How would you answer the question, “What is the meaning of life?” Jonathan Gabay of England has published a book containing the answers of well-known individuals to that query. One of them, a church leader, gave a thought-provoking testimony. As a child, he says, he watched his family’s black and white TV, wishing that he could get a clearer picture. Nonetheless, he was glad they had even that unsatisfactory set.

Then his family discovered that an outside antenna was needed. “Suddenly,” he said, “we found that we could get clear and distinct pictures. Our enjoyment was transformed.” Then he draws this comparison: “Life without a relationship with God through Jesus Christ is like the television without the antenna.”

Without a knowledge of God and His purposes revealed in the Bible and in Christ, we humans have at best a blurred picture of the invisible, holy Creator. But when we pick up the Bible and encounter Jesus Christ, the Man who was God-in-the-flesh, the fuzziness vanishes. As Jesus Himself declared, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (JOHN 14:9).

Have you been trying to tune in to the meaning of life? You’ll need God’s antenna to get the picture. 🌿

VERNON GROUNDS


TODAY’S READING

1 John 1:1-4

The life was manifested, and we have seen . . . and declare to you that eternal life. v. 2

Without the story of Jesus Christ found in God’s Word,
we would have no antenna
by which to understand God’s world.

To get a clear picture of God, look at Jesus Christ.

 ¹That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—²the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—³that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. ⁴And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

As John begins this important little letter, he explains to his readers his purpose for writing. His goal? He wants them to know a fullness of joy that is known only through a relationship with God. It needs to be understood that *joy* is different from *happiness*. Happiness is more emotionally based and rooted in our life circumstances. Joy, however, is a deep satisfaction that comes from being right with God. Only then can our joy be full.

INSIGHT



10 Reasons To Believe In The Bible

1. Its Honesty. The Bible is painfully honest. It shows Jacob, the father of God's "chosen people," to be a deceiver. It portrays David, Israel's most loved king and spiritual leader, as an adulterer, conspirator, and murderer. The Bible represents human nature as hostile to God. It predicts a future full of trouble. It teaches that the road to heaven is narrow and the way to hell is wide. The Bible was not written for people who want simple answers or an easy religion.

2. Its Preservation. In a cave by the Dead Sea, a 2,000-year-old copy of Isaiah's writings was found that is essentially the same as the book of Isaiah that appears in our Bibles. God has preserved His Word from error.

3. Its Claims For Itself. If the authors of Scripture had not claimed to speak for God, it would be presumptuous for us to make that claim for them. The Bible would then be a collection of unsolved mysteries, embodied in historical and ethical literature. But the Bible's authors did claim to be

inspired by God. Because millions have staked their present and eternal well-being on those claims, the Bible cannot be a good book if its authors consistently lied about their source of information.

4. Its Miracles. If the Red Sea did not part as Moses said it did, the Old Testament loses its authority to speak on behalf of God. If Jesus did not rise bodily from the dead, the apostle Paul admits that the Christian faith would be built on a lie (1 CORINTHIANS 15:14-17). The New Testament names its witnesses to the resurrection of Christ, and did so within a time-frame that enabled those claims to be investigated (1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-8). Many of the witnesses ended up as martyrs for their claim that Jesus had risen from the dead. Many have died for what they believed to be the truth. But people do not die for what they know to be a lie. The resurrection is powerful evidence of the Bible's authenticity.

5. Its Unity. Forty different authors over a period of 1,600 years penned the 66 books of the Bible. Yet, the 39 books of the Old Testament and 27 of the New Testament tell one unfolding story of God's plan of redemption. Together they give consistent answers to the most important questions we can ask: Why are we here? How can we know God? How can we make peace with our Maker?

6. Its Historical And Geographical Accuracy. Many have doubted the historical and geographical accuracy of the Bible. Yet modern archaeologists have repeatedly unearthed evidence of the people, places, and cultures described in the Scriptures. Time after time, the descriptions in the biblical record have been shown to be more reliable than the speculations of scholars.

7. Its Endorsement By Christ. Christ endorsed the Bible not only by His words but by His life. He made it clear that He believed the Old Testament Scriptures (MATTHEW 4:1-11; 5:17-19). He believed the Bible was a book about Himself. He said, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life”

(JOHN 5:39-40).

8. Its Prophetic Accuracy. From the days of Moses, the Bible predicted events no one wanted to believe. Before Israel went into the Promised Land, Moses predicted that Israel would be unfaithful, that she would lose the land God was giving her, and that she would be dispersed throughout all the world, regathered, and then re-established (DEUTERONOMY 28-31). Those events happened as prophesied. Central to Old Testament prophecy was the promise of a Messiah who would save God’s people from their sins and eventually bring judgment and peace to the whole world.

9. Its Survival. The Bible has been in existence for 2,000 years. During that long history, no other book has been as loved or as hated as the Bible. No other book has been so consistently bought, studied, and quoted as this book. The Bible is still the book by which all other books are measured.

10. Its Power To Change Lives. History is marked by those who claim to believe in the Bible and have been changed and bettered by it. The Ten Commandments are a source of moral direction to countless numbers of people. The psalms of David have comforted many in times of trouble and loss. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount has given millions a pattern for right living. Paul’s description of love in 1 Corinthians 13 has softened angry hearts.

You're Not Alone. You're not alone if you have questions about the reliability of the Bible. The Scriptures, like the world around us, are marked by elements of mystery. Yet if the Bible is what it claims to be, you don't have to try to sort out the evidence on your own. You can be sure that the Author will help you to find satisfying answers to your searching questions.

One important key to understanding the Bible is that it was never meant merely to bring us to itself. Every principle of Scripture shows us our need of the forgiveness that Christ secured on our behalf. It shows us why we need to let the Spirit of God live through us. It is for such a relationship that the Bible was given. 🌿

Shared Tears

A story is told about a little boy with a big heart. His next-door neighbor was an older gentleman whose wife had recently died. When the youngster saw the elderly man crying, he climbed up onto his lap and simply sat there.

Later, his mother asked the boy what he had said to their saddened neighbor. “Nothing,” the child replied. “I just helped him cry.”

Sometimes that is the best thing we can do for people who are facing profound sorrow. Often, our attempts to say something wise and helpful are far less valuable than just sitting next to the bereaved ones, holding their hand, and crying with them.

One of the ways we can help our fellow believers is to “weep with those who weep” (ROMANS 12:15). Jesus demonstrated that principle when He visited Mary and Martha after Lazarus died. Sensing the depths of Mary’s despair over her brother Lazarus’ death, Jesus shared her grief by weeping (JOHN 11:35). Bystanders took note and said, “See how He loved him!” (JOHN 11:36).

Sometimes the best thing we can do for those who are traveling life’s most sad and lonely road is to “help them cry.” Jesus showed us that it’s important to share another’s tears. Is there anyone who needs your tears today? 🌿

DAVE BRANON

A heartfelt tear can show our love
As words can never do;
It says, “I want to share your pain—
My heart goes out to you.” D. DEHAAN

TODAY’S READING

John 11:17-19,30-36

**Rejoice with those
who rejoice, and
weep with those
who weep.**

Romans 12:15

A sorrow shared is a sorrow halved.

¹⁷So when Jesus came, He found that [Lazarus] had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. ¹⁹And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. . . .

³⁰Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him. ³¹Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, "She is going to the tomb to weep there." ³²Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. ³⁴And He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵Jesus wept. ³⁶Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!"

In verse 33, Jesus is described as groaning and being troubled as He sees the grief of the mourners. We could ask why, when Jesus knew that soon He would raise Lazarus back to life. Perhaps it is a grief over the awful results of sin, and the impact that death has on the lives of all it touches.

INSIGHT

Unopened Tomorrows

We often wish we could see what lies around the corner in life. Then we could prepare for it, control it, or avoid it.

A wise person has said, “Though we can’t see around corners, God can.” How much better and more reassuring that is!

Recently my 10-year-old granddaughter Emily and I were boiling eggs for breakfast. As we stared into the boiling water and wondered how long it would take to get the eggs just right, Emily said, “Pity we can’t open them up to see how they’re doing.” I agreed. But that would have spoiled them, so we had to rely on guesswork, with no guarantee of results.

We began talking about other things we would like to see but can’t—like tomorrow. Too bad we can’t crack tomorrow open, we said, to see if it’s the way we would like it. But meddling with tomorrow before its time, like opening a partly cooked egg, would spoil both today and tomorrow.

Because Jesus has promised to care for us every day—and that includes tomorrow—we can live by faith one day at a time (MATTHEW 6:33-34).

Emily and I decided to leave tomorrow safely in God’s hands. Have you? 🌿

JOANIE YODER

TODAY’S READING

Matthew 6:25-34

**We walk by faith,
not by sight.**

2 Corinthians 5:7

Though I know not what awaits me,
What the future has in store,
Yet I know the Lord is faithful,
For I’ve proved Him oft before. ANON.

You’re only cooking up trouble when you stew about tomorrow.

²⁵Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? ²⁸So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; ²⁹and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹Therefore do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" ³²For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. ³⁴Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

This wonderful text is part of the most famous sermon in history, the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus began this sermon with a description of the blessed life (MATTHEW 5:1-10) and ended with the call to build life on a true spiritual foundation (7:24-27). In between (in Matthew 6), the practical result of both is seen—the blessed life built on a sure foundation need not be filled with worry. God is sufficient for our every need.

INSIGHT

Your Last Day

What if you were told this morning that today was to be your last day on earth? How would you spend its fleeting hours? Whom would you insist on seeing? Would your behavior differ radically from what it usually is?

Someone has wisely said, “You should treat every day as if it’s your last one, because one of these days you’re going to be right.”

There’s no getting around it. Whether our earthly life ends by accident, illness, the ravages of age, or our Lord’s return, one of these days will be our last. That’s why we should guard so carefully the things we do and the words we say.

We ought to be tying up the loose ends of long-neglected matters by expressing our love and gratitude to others, by seeking reconciliation with an alienated friend, or by sharing the gospel with a neighbor.

Perhaps you’ve even been putting off accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior until some more convenient day. But that day may never come. Since your last day on earth can be so unexpected, heed Paul’s inspired words: “Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 CORINTHIANS 6:2). Are you living each day as if it were your last? 🌿 *VERNON GROUNDS*

TODAY’S READING**1 Thessalonians 5:1-11**

Let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. v. 6

What are the five most important things you would do if this were your last day on earth?
Would you seek out God?

What would you change if this day were your last?

¹But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. ²For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. ³For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. ⁴But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. ⁵You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. ⁶Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. ⁷For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. ⁸But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. ¹¹Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

The apostle Paul uses the imagery of light versus darkness to describe spiritual living. This same imagery is found in John 1, as we read of Christ's light penetrating the darkness of a lost world. The tragedy was that the darkness did not comprehend the light (JOHN 1:5). Still today, people groping in the darkness struggle to comprehend the light of Christ. No wonder Paul wanted to remind his readers of these important issues.

INSIGHT

A Mystery Solved

What happens to us when we die? That mystery has intrigued people down through the ages.

Some researchers are cautiously suggesting that they may be close to an answer. They are checking into reports from individuals who claim to have undergone near-death experiences that took them beyond time and space. Some analysts think that further research will eventually solve the mystery of death.

Must we anxiously await their verdict? By no means! God has already revealed in the Bible what happens after death.

If we have trusted God's Son Jesus Christ as our Savior, we know we will be "present with the Lord" when we die (2 CORINTHIANS 5:8). Paul said that because Christ died for our sins and rose from the grave, "Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 CORINTHIANS 15:54). But those who reject Christ will have to face God's fierce judgment and an eternity in hell (REVELATION 20:11-15).

Anyone looking for clues about what happens to us when we die would be wise to research the Bible. It gives us God's answer to the most pressing question of the ages. Christ's empty tomb assures us that it is a mystery already solved. 🌿

TODAY'S READING

1 Corinthians 15:51-58

If a man dies, shall he live again?

Job 14:14

VERNON GROUNDS

He lives, and grants me daily breath;
 He lives, and I shall conquer death;
 He lives, my future to prepare;
 He lives to bring me safely there. MEDLEY

Because Christ lives, death is not tragedy but triumph.

⁵¹Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—⁵²in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. ⁵³For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory. ⁵⁵O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

There are few subjects that fill hearts with fear and anxiety more than the subject of death. Much of that anxiety is due to uncertainty, yet Paul makes it clear in this passage that such feelings of fear are unnecessary. We can have absolute confidence because Jesus Christ has won the victory over death by His resurrection—and offers the results of that victory to us if we will trust Him by faith.

INSIGHT

Empty Proof

In the days after the French Revolution, a man tried to start a new religion that he believed was superior to Christianity. But he was disappointed at his lack of success. He revealed his frustration to a clergyman and asked what he could do.

The clergyman replied that it was no easy task to begin a new religion—so difficult that he had nothing to suggest. But after a moment's reflection, he said, "There's one plan that you might want to consider. Why don't you get yourself crucified and rise again the third day?"

The firm foundation of the Christian faith is an empty tomb. The New Testament declares that the death of Jesus paid the penalty for our sin. But how can anyone know for sure that Christ's crucifixion was acceptable to God? It doesn't matter much what we think of the death of Jesus; what matters is what God thinks about it.

God's approval of Christ's sacrifice is proven by the resurrection. It stands as God's signed receipt that He is completely satisfied. Without the resurrection, Christianity has nothing much to offer the world. But the fact that Christ died and then rose from the grave "is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes" (ROMANS 1:16). 🌿

TODAY'S READING
1 Corinthians 15:1-8

**He rose again
the third day
according to the
Scriptures.** v. 4

HADDON ROBINSON

Some have said that Christianity is a relationship, not a religion.
Do you have that relationship?

Because of Christ's empty tomb, we can be full of hope.

¹Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, ²by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. ³For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. ⁶After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. ⁷After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. ⁸Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

Notice that Paul wants us to understand that the resurrection is not a philosophical abstraction or theological theory—it is a real, historical event that was attested to by a variety of witnesses. These witnesses numbered in the hundreds, and included a disgraced disciple (Peter, or Cephas), a doubting half-brother of Jesus (James), and a Christ-hater and persecutor of Christians (Paul himself). As a result of Jesus' resurrection, their lives were changed forever.

INSIGHT



10 Reasons To Believe God Became A Man

1. A Virgin Conceived. If Mary was telling the truth, her baby had no human father. An angel told her she would conceive a son by God's Spirit. This child, to be named Jesus, would be the Son of God (LUKE 1:26-35). If Mary was lying, the night of Jesus' birth was not holy, and the only thing that was silent was the truth. If her son's life was the same as any other life, her claim of a virgin birth would be the easiest of all stories to dismiss.

2. An Old Testament Prophet Predicted A God-Man. Seven hundred years before, the prophet Isaiah made this prediction, "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (ISAIAH 9:6). Isaiah also prophesied, "The Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel" (ISAIAH 7:14). Immanuel means "God with us."

3. Angels Announced The Birth. An angel announced the birth of Israel's long-awaited Messiah to terrified Jewish shepherds (LUKE 2:8-14). "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger" (VV.10-12).

4. A Sign Appeared In The Sky. A group of wise men from the East followed a star to the town of Bethlehem where they found the long-awaited Messiah. For hundreds of years Old Testament prophets had been speaking of "a Star" and "a Scepter" that would come out of Israel (NUMBERS 24:17), a ruler of Israel who would come out of Bethlehem, a ruler "whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting" (MICAH 5:2).

5. The Time Was Right. If the wise men who worshiped Jesus after His birth came from the region of Babylon, they could have had access to the prophecy of a Jewish prophet named Daniel. While in exile in Babylon 400 years earlier, Daniel had a vision (DANIEL 7:13-14; 9:24-27) that allows for the calculation of the arrival of the Jewish Messiah.

6. Jesus Claimed To Be Equal With God. Jesus repeatedly claimed to be one with God. Jesus has said, "Before Abraham was, I AM" (JOHN 8:58). (In Exodus 3:14, the name I AM was used by God to identify Himself to Moses.) "I and My Father are one" (JOHN 10:30). "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also" (JOHN 14:7). Jesus said that to love or hate Him, or to receive or reject Him, was to love or hate, receive or reject His Father in heaven.

7. His Friends Worshiped Him. When Thomas, one of Jesus' disciples, saw the resurrected Christ, he declared, "My Lord and my God!" (JOHN 20:28). The apostle John wrote, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (JOHN 1:1-3, 14).

8. Jesus' Enemies Accused Him Of Blasphemy. The religious leaders were outraged to think that the same man who accused them of being hypocritical and blind leaders, would also claim to forgive sins, speak of God as His Father, and even say that He was one with God. The religious leaders picked up stones to kill Jesus, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God" (JOHN 10:33).

9. Jesus' Miracles Supported His Claims. Jesus' miracles were signs and wonders to encourage men and women to believe in Him. He walked on water, healed the sick, and even raised the dead. The apostle John wrote, "Truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (JOHN 20:30-31).

10. His Departure Was Greater Than His Arrival. Many people have claimed to be gods. Yet only one man has been willing to die for the sins of others. Only one has risen from the dead to prove that He is the Son of God. After Jesus voluntarily gave His life on an executioner's cross, He appeared to His closest disciples and more than 500 other followers for a period of 40 days (1 CORINTHIANS 15:5-8). The

eyewitnesses were so convinced of His resurrection that they were willing to suffer and die for their claims. Then on the Mount of Olives, He gave them His last words and ascended into the clouds. With a departure more spectacular than His arrival, Jesus left us with a better understanding of the announcement of the angel who said, “There is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (LUKE 2:11).

You're Not Alone. You're not alone if you have mixed feelings when you think about the evidence surrounding the life of Jesus. You may feel compelled to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but you're not sure of your relationship to Him. If that's the case, be assured of this: If you accept Him, He will accept you. If you will receive His offer of forgiveness, everlasting life, and adoption into the family of God, He will become your Savior, Teacher, and Lord. It's the greatest gift of all—the gift bought by God Himself—for you. 🌿

No Greater Love

You can't show a greater love for people than James Harrison demonstrated. And he did it for people he didn't even know.

Harrison, a member of the Ouachita Baptist University choir, was returning home from Europe with his fellow singers. As their plane was landing in Little Rock, Arkansas, it was hit by heavy rains and high winds. The jet skidded off the runway and hit a bank of lights, ripping open the fuselage.

As chaos reigned and flames broke out in the mangled plane, Harrison began to help others. Over and over, he pulled passengers to safety and ran back to the plane for more. On his last trip into the burning wreckage, he was overcome by smoke. He didn't make it out alive.

At his funeral, the choir director quoted John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." Jesus was really speaking of His own death on our behalf, and the choir leader pointed out the value of this ultimate sacrifice.

We may never be called upon to make the kind of sacrifice Harrison made during that tragedy. Yet every day we have opportunities to set aside our comfort to love our neighbors (MARK 12:31). How much love do we show? 🌿

DAVE BRANON

TODAY'S READING

Mark 12:28-34

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

John 15:13

The more Christ's love within us grows,
The more His graciousness outflows;
And when we face a fiery test,
His love we then will manifest. HESS

In a world that "couldn't care less," Christ wants us to care more.

²⁸Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, “Which is the first commandment of all?” ²⁹Jesus answered him, “The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. ³¹And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” ³²So the scribe said to Him, “Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. ³³And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” ³⁴Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” But after that no one dared question Him.

The call to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength is a call to love Him with all your being. Though defined in various ways, it could be said that these elements include all of our love (heart), our life (soul), our thoughts (mind), and our energy (strength). These four things really do encompass all that we are—and give insight on how to fully and completely love God.

INSIGHT

Work That Won't Burn

My father-in-law spent 30 years helping people in the public health field. When he went to heaven at the age of 76, he left a closet full of files and a wall full of awards.

When it came time for us to clean out his “work” closet, the family pictures and a few mementos were kept, and all the rest had to go. I got the job of disposing of it. I hauled it up past the barn into an open field, doused it with diesel fuel, and set it on fire—old project files, slide presentations, plaques of appreciation, correspondence, everything—and I watched it burn.

It was a sobering experience as I thought that someday when I stand before God, all my “work” will meet the same test. Only what survives the fire has eternal value.

Watching letters and proposals turn to ashes gave me a new understanding of 1 Corinthians 3:13. Paul said, “Each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is.”

Today the work. Tomorrow the fire.

That afternoon in the pasture made me more careful, more thoughtful, about my fleeting opportunities to do work that won’t burn. 🌿

DAVID MCCASLAND

TODAY’S READING

1 Corinthians 3:9-15

**The fire will test
each one’s work,
of what sort it is.**

v. 13

To know our works will all be judged
Should give us deep concern:
But if for Christ our works are done,
Then they’ll endure—not burn. HESS

Live today as if you will stand before God tomorrow.

To Be Continued

Do you like continued stories? Let's say you're reading a magazine article or watching a television program for half an hour, and you come to the place where the hero plunges into the water to rescue his drowning sweetheart. Then you're left hanging in the air with the words: "To be continued." How disappointing!

I have quite a different response to the inscription on the tombstone of a follower of Christ. It reads: "To Be Continued Above."


Yes, this life is but the first chapter of the book of life. Whether that chapter is long or short, it is not the end, but it is to be continued. For the believer, it will be continued in heaven with our Lord. There is no break between the chapters; you don't have to wait till next month's installment or tune in next week to hear the concluding episode. Chapter two follows chapter one without interruption. It is continued immediately, for "to be absent from the body [is] to be present with the Lord" (2 CORINTHIANS 5:8).

What will the next chapter be for you? It will be written sooner or later, either in heaven or in hell. Remember, when your time comes to die, that is not the end. Your story is "to be continued"—but where? 🌿

M.R. DEHAAN

Life's fleeting days will soon be o'er
When death ends all that's gone before;
Yet life in Christ continues still,
For all who lived to do His will. D. DEHAAN

Death is the last chapter of time, but the first chapter of eternity.

 ⁸By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; ¹⁰for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. ¹¹By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. ¹²Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. ¹³These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. ¹⁴For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. ¹⁵And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

Hebrews 11 is sometimes referred to as “The Hall of Faith” because it describes how several ancient believers lived out their trust in God. Verses 8-16 highlight the lives of Abraham and Sarah. Abraham obeyed when the Lord led him to a new land, and his wife Sarah trusted God’s promise of a son.

INSIGHT

Taking The Medicine

Suppose you are rushed to the hospital, where a physician examines you and informs you that you are critically ill. He says you'll die unless you have proper treatment. He then prescribes medicine and says, "If you will take this, I can assure you with absolute certainty that you will get well."

Now, what should you do? Should you just lie there on your sickbed and believe that the doctor has diagnosed your illness correctly, and that the prescription will surely make you well? No, that's not enough. To live, you must take the medicine.

It's the same with salvation. You may believe everything the Bible says about Christ—that He died for your sins and rose from the dead. But if you refuse to "take Him"—that is, to trust Him and His work on the cross on your behalf—you will be just as lost as if you had openly and blatantly denied Jesus.

Saving faith, you see, is not simply acknowledging that certain facts about Christ are true. It is reaching out to personally accept God's remedy for sin. It is entrusting the destiny of your soul to Him for eternity. It is saying, "Save me, Lord Jesus. I believe that You can and will." That's "taking the medicine"—that's receiving Jesus Christ. Have you done that? If not, do it right now. 🙏

RICHARD DEHAAN

TODAY'S READING

Isaiah 55:1-6

**Whoever calls on
the name of the
Lord shall be saved.**

Romans 10:13

Have you tried the world's prescription for the disease of sin to no avail?

Only God's remedy is effective.

Is there any reason why you shouldn't ask Jesus to save you?

Faith is not just believing that Jesus can save; it's asking Him to do it.

There When You Need It

When I donated blood some time ago, a nurse gave me a card to read while a pint of the vital red fluid was flowing out of my vein. The card showed the percentages of people who have the different blood types. Here are some of them:

O Positive 37.4%

A Positive 35.7%

A Negative 6.3%

B Negative 1.5%

The rarest, AB Negative, is found in only 1 in 167 people, or 0.6% of the population. Then the card made this eye-catching statement: “The rarest blood type is the one that’s not there when you need it.”

That reminded me of a supply of blood that is one of a kind and always available to those who ask for it. 1 John 1:7 states, “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

It was the death of Christ, the shedding of His blood, that satisfied the demand of a holy God as payment for our sins (HEBREWS 9:12,22). So now, whenever a person cries out in faith to God, repenting of his sin and pleading for forgiveness, his prayer for salvation is answered.

I am deeply grateful that Jesus was willing to die on the cross, giving His blood for me, so that forgiveness was available when I needed it. Aren’t you? 🙏

DAVE EGNER

TODAY’S READING

Hebrews 9:11-12,15-22

The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. 1 John 1:7

Lord, I believe Your precious blood,
Which at the mercy seat of God
Forever does for sinners plead,
For me, e’en for my soul was shed. VON ZINZENDORF

Jesus takes our sin and gives us His salvation.

¹¹But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. ¹²Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. . . .

¹⁵And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. ¹⁶For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. ¹⁷For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives. ¹⁸Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood. ¹⁹For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, ²⁰saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you." ²¹Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. ²²And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.

The words *testament* and *testator* may be unfamiliar to you. A testament was a will, and the testator was the one who enacted that will, to be implemented when he died.

INSIGHT



10 Reasons To Believe In The Christian Faith

1. The Credibility Of Its Founder. Christ said He came from heaven to die for our sins, and to bring to His Father all who believe in Him. Logic says that He was either a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord of heaven. His followers saw His miracles, heard His teachings, examined His blameless life, witnessed His terrible death, and saw Him alive again. They concluded, “We have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (JOHN 6:69).

2. The Reliability Of Its Book. Written over a period of about 1,600 years by 40 different authors, the Bible tells one story that begins with creation and concludes on the threshold of eternity. The integrity of its historical and geographical record is supported by archaeology. The accuracy with which it has been copied and handed down to us has been confirmed by the Dead Sea Scrolls of Qumran.

3. Its Explanations For Life. All religious systems attempt to give meaning to our existence, to explain our thirst for

significance, the problem of pain, and the inevitability of death. All religions attempt to apply the design of the cosmos to our individual lives. It is Christ who reveals a Father who takes note of every sparrow that falls, a Father who numbers even the hairs of our head (MATTHEW 10:29-31), a God who shows how much He cares for all that He has created. It is Christ who clothed Himself in our humanity to feel what we feel, and then to suffer and die in our place.

4. Its Continuity With The Past. Those who trust Christ are accepting the same Creator and Lord worshiped by Adam, Abraham, Sarah, and Solomon. The Christian faith is not new with Christ. From Genesis to Revelation it is one story. It is His story—and ours (ACTS 2:22-39; 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-8).

“I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you . . . For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once” (1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-6).

5. Its Foundational Claim. The first Christians were witnesses who risked their lives to tell the world that they had seen an innocent man die and then miraculously resurrected 3 days later (ACTS 5:17-42). They testified that Jesus was crucified under the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. His body was buried and sealed in a borrowed tomb. Guards were posted to prevent grave tampering. Yet after 3 days the tomb was empty and witnesses were risking their lives to declare that He was alive.

6. Its Power To Change Lives. The first disciples were not the only ones who were dramatically changed. Paul, one of their worst enemies, was transformed from a Christian killer into one of their chief advocates (GALATIANS 1:11-24). Later Paul wrote about this power to change lives, “Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-11).

“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” (1 TIMOTHY 1:15).

7. Its Analysis Of Human Nature. Many want to believe that our problems are rooted in ignorance, diet, and government. But Jesus pointed to sin in the heart. “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man” (MATTHEW 15:19-20).

8. Its View Of Human Achievement. Generation after generation has hoped for the best. We fought wars that would end all wars. We developed educational theories that would produce enlightened, nonviolent children. We conceived technologies that would make life easier for ourselves. In spite of mankind’s high hopes and efforts, this world is approaching a terrible endtime predicted by the Bible (MATTHEW 24:5-31; 2 TIMOTHY 3:1-5).

9. Its Impact On Society. A carpenter from Nazareth changed the world. Calendars and dated documents bear silent witness to His birth. Basic Christian values have been foundational to social morality, work ethic, and social relief efforts.

10. Its Offer Of Salvation. The Christian faith offers forgiveness and adoption into God's family by trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior (ROMANS 10:9-13). The salvation that Jesus offers does not depend on what we have done for Him, but on our acceptance of what He has done for us. This salvation requires an admission of our sins and a confession of failure (EPHESIANS 2:8-10).

You're Not Alone. You're not alone if you are still unconvinced about the reasonableness of faith in Christ. But keep in mind Jesus' claim that we don't have to resolve our doubts on our own. He said, "If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether My teaching comes from God or whether I speak on My own" (JOHN 7:17 NIV).

If you do see the reasonableness of faith in Christ, the Bible offers to you this reassuring promise: "As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (JOHN 1:12). The salvation Christ offers is not a reward for effort, but a gift to all who put their trust in Him. 🌿

Making It Personal

It is possible to be close to Christ, yet so far from the life He offers. This was true even among His original 12 disciples. Even in that inner circle there was one, probably the most trusted member of the group (for he kept the money), who never really had the kind of personal connection with Christ that we are talking about.

Judas knew a lot about Jesus. He knew the Teacher's habits well enough to lead Jesus' enemies to a garden meeting place. He knew Christ well enough to betray Him with a kiss of greeting. But Judas didn't know Jesus as his Savior and Lord. Trusted though he was, the "keeper of the money" never had the kind of personal, Christ-centered relationship with God that is available to us today.

**“Knowing Christ died—that’s history.
Believing He died for me—that’s salvation.”**

A personal relationship with God begins with an event Jesus called a new birth (JOHN 3:3). When we are born spiritually into God's family we become His children and members of His spiritual kingdom.

To begin this personal relationship, take these steps:

Admit your need. We come into this world physically alive but spiritually dead—missing out on the quality of life for which God made us. The Bible says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (ROMANS 3:23), “there is none righteous, no, not one” (ROMANS 3:10), and “the wages of sin is death” (ROMANS 6:23). Therefore, we need a Savior.

Realize what God has done for you. God loved us enough to send His own Son into this world to rescue us from the devastating effects of our sin (JOHN 1:1-14; 3:16). Jesus died in our place, offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice. With one sacrifice, He paid for the least—and the worst—of our sins.

Personally believe and receive God's gift. No one is saved by trying to be good. We are saved by trusting in Christ. The Bible says, “By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (EPHESIANS 2:8-9).

The actual words we say to God to receive this gift may vary. What is important is that we believe Him enough to be able to say something similar to the following:

God, I know I have sinned against You. I believe that Jesus is Your Son, that He died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins, and that He rose from the dead to prove it. Now I accept Your offer of full forgiveness and eternal life. I accept Jesus as Your gift for my salvation.

If this is the honest expression of your heart, you have entered into a personal relationship with God! 🌿

Adapted from the booklet *What Is A Personal Relationship With God?*
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