

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2020

FREE TO SERVE

SCRIPTURE: EXODUS 20:1–4, 7–9, 12–20

Law Me Alive!

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Exodus 20:2

In days gone by, when the language of exclamation was a bit different than it is today, I occasionally heard someone cry, “Law me alive!” It was usually an expression of surprise or unexpected good fortune, though it could also convey exasperation. But the Ten Commandments invite a different take on that old phrase. The Lord gave the sacred law to the once-captive people of Israel to equip them for a new way of life. Released from bondage, they were to find freedom in obedience to the commands of God. Through God’s law they were granted new life!

Sometimes we contrast the ideas of law and grace in the Bible as if they are opposites. When the Lord gave the law through Moses, it was an act of divine grace, setting the people on a whole new trajectory. In Jesus, the grace of God was revealed, and God’s law was fulfilled.



Lord, release us from captivity and into the freedom of service to you. Amen.

George R. Estes, Germantown, Tennessee

FREE TO SERVE
SCRIPTURE: PSALM 19

Acceptable Offerings

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation
of my heart
be acceptable to you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.*

Psalm 19:14

This beautiful closing verse of Psalm 19 is often used in worship services. The psalmist was entranced by God's handiwork in creating the heavens and the earth and was in awe of the perfection of the divine law (Torah). Yet these cosmic realities are experienced on a disarmingly personal level. Creation and law are not mere theological affirmations, but they also hold the key to the individual's transforming relationship to God. They are a warning to God's servant, and they offer protection against transgression. So the psalm concludes with a deeply personal request.

It's a prayer with two foci—the outward testimony (“words of my mouth”) and the inward reflection (“meditation of my heart”). For Jesus, the outward expression was a product of the heart. The psalmist asks for congruity between the inmost yearnings as God's person and the witness one shares with others. Acceptable offerings are one's words and thoughts! That's a heavy-duty prayer.

*God of grace, thank you for accepting us as living
sacrifices in Christ. Amen.*

George R. Estes, Germantown, Tennessee

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2020

FREE TO SERVE

SCRIPTURE: PHILIPPIANS 3:7–14

Following Forward

I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:14

When Jesus called a person to follow him, it was as much to follow forward as to follow after! Christ called his followers to a changed life, to a new direction, to a life centered not in self but in God, and to spiritual rebirth. No one knew that better than the apostle Paul. In this passage, Paul talks about forgetting what is past—even the stellar upbringing he had and his enviable heritage—and straining toward what is ahead, the goal toward which he is called in Christ Jesus. That's following forward.

It is a bold stance to live toward the future, toward the unfolding plan of God that we cannot yet fully see or understand. But that is where Paul was headed, not by virtue of his own strength, still less because of any of his own righteousness. He was headed toward the right future by the grace of God.

Paul knew what we may have come to realize in our own faith journey. Following forward is possible only when following after Jesus Christ.



Thank you, Lord, for your call in our lives. Amen.

George R. Estes, Germantown, Tennessee

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2020

FREE TO SERVE

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 21:33–46

Trouble in the Vineyard

Finally he sent his son to them, saying, “They will respect my son.”

Matthew 21:37

Today is Worldwide Communion Day, and it is fitting that our biblical reflection takes us to a vineyard. We think, of course, of the cup at the Lord’s Table, filled with the fruit of a vineyard. But that is not the imagery of this parable. Instead it illustrates humankind’s rebellious history with God and God’s emissaries. Despite the landowner’s best provision for the vineyard, those to whom it has been entrusted forget their obligations in the chasm of their greed and self-centeredness. Instead of returning the agreed-upon portion of the fruit from the land, they abuse and kill the landowner’s messengers. Finally, as if they don’t care about the consequences, they do the same to the heir, the landowner’s son.

What a tragic depiction of humanity’s rejection of divine love! Yet as this story became reality via the cross and the resurrection of Christ, the one who was rejected is now proclaimed to be the cornerstone of God’s saving work in the world.

It is, after all, a call to communion!



O God, with those who are faithful, in all times and places, we celebrate your amazing grace. Amen.

George R. Estes, Germantown, Tennessee

SHADES OF GRACE

SCRIPTURE: EXODUS 32:1–14

A Changed Mind

And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on [the] people.

Exodus 32:14

There's no more devastating feeling than when a loved one disappoints us. The desire to strike back crowds out our better nature. But when we truly love that person, we can change our mind. That's how I read the Lord's experience with the people when they fashioned a golden calf. Moses was upset with the people too, throwing down the two tablets of the law in disgust at the sight of the people reveling in the shadow of the idol, but he asked God to spare them. Moses knew that God would not abrogate the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The prohibition of graven images had not yet been shared with the people. It was on those broken tablets! Moses' intercession, though, only revealed more of God's own character. The story affirms the matchless grace of God. Even today, despite the repeated disobedience of people, God still offers love and mercy.

Did God change God's mind? More likely God revealed the grace that ultimately led God to give us Jesus, God's only son!



*Thank you, God, for grace greater than our sin.
Amen.*

George R. Estes, Germantown, Tennessee

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2020

SHADES OF GRACE

SCRIPTURE: PHILIPPIANS 4:1–9

An Old Problem

I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.

Philippians 4:2

Dee and Sharon are elders in the church. Dee teaches a Sunday school class, and Sharon leads the care team. They both have been in the congregation a long time, but Dee was here first. Her children were raised here, and her husband's memorial service was in the sanctuary last year. Sharon is single and has managed to adopt just about everybody in the church. They're all her family! All, that is, except Dee. No one knows why, but the friction between them is well documented. Who had the bright idea of putting them on the board at the same time?

Sharon and Dee aren't real people and could just as readily be men as women. But the problem between them is as old as the Letter to the Philippians. Paul, after appealing to two folks to "be of the same mind in the Lord," asks another member of the church to help mediate their differences, for they are all coworkers for the gospel together. That person must surely be a child of God, for didn't Jesus say, "blessed are the peacemakers" (Matt. 5:9)?

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*Lord, help us deal lovingly with personality clashes.
Amen.*

George R. Estes, Germantown, Tennessee

SHADES OF GRACE

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 106:1–6, 19–23

Steadfast Love

*O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever.*

Psalm 106:1b

This is one of my favorite invitations of the psalms. This refrain begins Psalms 106, 107, and 118, the latter ending with it as well. Also, the story of King David bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem is accompanied by a psalm that was commissioned by the king, and it contains this verse (1 Chron. 16:34)! But while affirming the love of God, the psalmist proceeds to recount the nation's checkered past, referring to specific instances of the people's waywardness. Psalm 106 even recalls the spiritual low point of the golden calf episode. Repeatedly the psalmist describes how God's anger was kindled against the people, but each time God's steadfast love ultimately preserved them.

God's love is amazing. Paul said, when writing of love at its best, the love we know is found fully in God alone: Love bears all things . . . love never ends (1 Cor. 13:7–8). First John says it in the clearest possible way: "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16).

*From our faltering love, O God, we give thanks for
your unfailing love. Amen.*

George R. Estes, Germantown, Tennessee

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2020

SHADES OF GRACE

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 23

The Shadow

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil.*

Psalm 23:4

Whenever I visit a hospital ICU, I'm impressed with the specialized care and astonishing medical technology there. My friend is very weak, a nonagenarian approaching the valley of the shadow. And she is not afraid. She is a person of great faith in God. The ICU is a place of daily walks through that dark valley, and it's also a place of brilliant light and life.

Still, it is hard to see a loved one suffer. The New Testament proclaims that, in the Lord's coming reign, the "last enemy to be destroyed" will be death (1 Cor. 15:26). Yet sometimes death is not the enemy but a compassionate friend. For Christ's follower, it is the opening of an eternal door.

When theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer was led away to be executed in a Nazi prison camp, he said, "This is the end—for me, the beginning of life."^{*} The shadow of death isn't always noticeable. But when it is, for the person of faith there is a sigh of blessing and of hope.

*God of life and light, be with us and our loved ones
when the shadow falls. Amen.*

George R. Estes, Germantown, Tennessee

^{*} "Anti-Nazi Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer Is Hanged," History, Nov. 5, 2009, <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/defiant-theologian-dietrich-bonhoeffer-is-hanged>.

SHADES OF GRACE

SCRIPTURE: PHILIPPIANS 4:1–9

No Worries

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Philippians 4:6

“No worries,” a young man said to me as he took my order at a restaurant. We hear that expression a lot today. It means about the same thing as “no problem,” when usually there wasn’t a problem to begin with! As a substitute for the old-fashioned “you’re welcome,” it can seem almost dismissive, like saying, “Let’s move on!”

Was the apostle Paul’s counsel to the church at Philippi like that? We don’t think so. His comment echoes Jesus’ instructions to his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life . . .” (Matt. 6:25). The first readers of Paul’s letter had plenty of reasons to be anxious, as we all do. Without intending to minimize those concerns, the apostle suggests that the Christian is privileged to be able to balance them with trust in a loving, listening God.

Our worries are real. Yet we need not carry them alone. We find peace in prayer—not only a plea for help but also thanksgiving for mercies received.



Lord, ease our worry with confidence in your abiding care. Amen.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2020

SHADES OF GRACE

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 22:1-14

Dressed Down

“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe.”

Matthew 22:11

There are still some special occasions where we're expected to dress up. Typically a wedding is one of those times. We may know the feeling of embarrassment of arriving at an event in casual clothes only to realize everyone else dressed up.

Not so in this parable from Matthew. Coming into the king's presence without proper attire is a serious matter indeed. We realize, of course, that the story is pointing to a deeper spiritual truth. The garment required of those who long to enter the Lord's presence will not win the award for “Best Dressed.” It is not the flowing raiment of those who seek to impress others with their goodness. No, ours has the appearance of rags, for we come as sinners who have no place at the celebration unless the Lord exchanges our tatters for the robe of life.

On that day, our garment will be composed of humility, trust, obedience, and joy.

Lord, may we come to you with no righteousness but your own. Amen.

George R. Estes, Germantown, Tennessee

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2020

GOD'S PRESENCE IN OUR LIVES

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 99

The God of Wonder, Who Is Near

They cried to the LORD, and he answered them.

Psalm 99:6b

Psalm 99 leads us to imagine the breathtaking splendor of God. God sits enthroned upon the cherubim, and God is exalted over all the peoples. And the phrase “holy is he” is repeated throughout the psalm. The beauty, majesty, and holiness of God are overwhelming. God is qualitatively different from humans.

But God does not choose to stay far from us because of this difference. With all God's awesome aspects, God comes near to us. Approaching us, God forgives our sins, listens to our cries, and answers them. About six hundred years ago, a king in Korea ordered a big drum to be put near the palace. Anyone who had suffered a false accusation or unjust damage could beat the drum. When the king heard the sound, he would come out to listen to the person's appeal. God hears our prayers and gives us God's royal support. The majestic God is our kind savior, who rejoices in sharing God's self with us, in boundless love for us.



Lord, both stunning glory and humble love belong to you. Amen.

Joon Ki Kim, New Glasgow, Nova Scotia

GOD'S PRESENCE IN OUR LIVES

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 17:11-19

**The Great Thanksgiving
from an Abandoned One**

He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan.

Luke 17:16

In the time of Jesus, lepers were shunned to the very bottom of society. Physical disease, social alienation, and religious condemnation combined to make their lives painful in myriad ways. When a group of lepers called to Jesus for help, he let them know that God's presence and healing grace were fully given to them.

If we ever think that the troubles in life diminish the opportunities to offer our thanksgivings, Luke 17:11-19 shows that the truth is quite the opposite. It is not because the trouble itself is glorious. It is because in our suffering and brokenness, Christ is nearest to us. With the power of creating new heaven and earth, the Lord restores our joy and hope.

The punch line of the story is that the only person who came back to give thanks to Jesus was a Samaritan, who was doubly marginalized and hurt among the ten lepers. God creates the occasions of the most joyful thanksgiving even out of the most severe suffering. Thanks be to God!

God, you create and call forth the songs of joy even out of the depth of suffering. Amen.

Joon Ki Kim, New Glasgow, Nova Scotia

GOD'S PRESENCE IN OUR LIVES

SCRIPTURE: EXODUS 33:12–23

How God Listens

The LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name."

Exodus 33:17

For many years, the image of God that I had in my mind was basically static. God knows all; God decides all by God's self, being somewhat aloof from what happens in the world. Nevertheless, when I looked at the Bible more carefully, I was startled by the dynamic nature of God, which many biblical texts attest to. God is deeply engaged with the realities of the world. Moreover, God is willing to converse with people, and the result of the interactions affects God!

Here is a good example. Moses knew that God had been stunned and grieved by the waywardness of his people, so he strongly asked God to continue to lead him and his people. God's response: God would do everything that Moses asked God to do. God listened to, pondered on, and incorporated requests from Moses in order to shape the latter part of their journey, the future of God's people. God gladly interacts with us to deepen God's relationship with us because of God's astonishing love.

Considering how you treat us in your love, may we learn to listen to you with all our hearts. Amen.

Joon Ki Kim, New Glasgow, Nova Scotia

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2020

GOD'S PRESENCE IN OUR LIVES

SCRIPTURE: EXODUS 33:12–23

The Inexhaustible Mystery

“You shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.”

Exodus 33:23b

I knew a teacher of theology who was a kind and thoughtful mentor to me when I was studying theology in Knox College in Toronto. One day, I came up to him and asked, “Today in your class, it sounded as if you intended to say that, essentially, God is a huge mystery. Is that right?” My concern was that if a crucial aspect of God might be a mystery, it would not be possible to give brilliant, clear answers to many challenging questions raised about the legitimacy of faith and the presence of God. Hearing what I said, my teacher said to me, “Yes, indeed. If God is not a mystery, I do not think that I can truly worship God. How can we worship a certain being, if the being can be thoroughly figured out by our human intellect and capabilities?”

As God is a mystery that we cannot perfectly understand, the Bible presents the matter of faith not in terms of certainty but in terms of trust. The biblical revelations point to the inexhaustible goodness and love of God, whom we can fully trust.



Your goodness stuns us with its mysterious depth. Amen.

Joon Ki Kim, New Glasgow, Nova Scotia

GOD'S PRESENCE IN OUR LIVES
SCRIPTURE: 1 THESSALONIANS 1:1–10

Gratitude for Everyone

We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly.

1 Thessalonians 1:2

Paul thanked God for all the people in the Thessalonian believing community. It is not that he enjoyed the presence of *some* particular members of the community, who were notably gifted, exceptionally kind, or outstandingly committed to God's ministry. All of them led him to his genuine gratitude for God. Interacting with diverse people in our believing communities, we may be elated and inspired, but also, at least sometimes, we may be frustrated or even hurt by the words or actions of other members of the communities. How can we be thankful for all of them?

Paul knew well that he was not to appreciate the people in the communities according to one's merits or lack thereof. All the people whom he served and worked with in Christ were parts of *one body*, whose head is Christ. All of them—as his brothers and sisters—were being nourished, challenged, and transformed together by the grace of God. That was his pivotal understanding of the church communities.



How beautiful it is for the people of God to live together in love and gratitude for one another. Amen.

Joon Ki Kim, New Glasgow, Nova Scotia

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2020

GOD'S PRESENCE IN OUR LIVES

SCRIPTURE: 1 THESSALONIANS 1:1–10

God's Presence in Suffering

In spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 1:6b

When we experience troubles in life, we may think something that is not supposed to happen is happening. Paul's understanding of hardship in life is very different. He taught that, essentially, to live as a Christian entailed suffering of various forms. The suffering may be related to an outward oppression used for the purpose of deterring one's trust in God, challenges in faith communities, or pain in one's personal life.

When we face difficulties, our human instinct may prompt us to find a way to get out of them as soon as possible, no matter what. But the message from Paul helps us to understand that the troubles can open up opportunities to hear and receive the Word of God in inspiring, creative, and transformative ways—as the faithful people in Thessalonica did. In terms of our Christian life, there is new meaningful learning, growth, and change that we can have in spite of afflictions. In the midst of suffering, Paul and those Thessalonians were filled with the bountiful joy of God, to which all of us are gladly invited.



God, we celebrate your living presence in all situations of life. Amen.

Joon Ki Kim, New Glasgow, Nova Scotia

GOD'S PRESENCE IN OUR LIVES

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 22:15–22

To God What Is God's

“Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.”

Matthew 22:21b

In order to get Jesus in trouble, the religious leaders asked him a tricky question: “Is it right to pay taxes to the emperor?” (v. 17). In those days, the land of Israel had been colonized by the Roman Empire. Facing the question, Jesus said, “Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.” Jesus admitted that, because Jews were living under the governance of Rome, it was not necessarily wrong for them to pay taxes. But Jesus also clarified a crucial point: “Give God what is God's,” which could mean, *when you give back to Caesar what is his, never forget that he is not God, even though he pretends to be.*

From the Bible, we learn that all of the earth belongs to God; the slain lamb of God will turn out to be the final victor over all the powers of the world. Through our words and actions that seek the justice and peace of God, the light of Christ shines in the midst of the world.



*Empower us to testify to your goodness in our lives,
both personal and public. Amen.*

Joon Ki Kim, New Glasgow, Nova Scotia

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2020

LOVE FOR GOD AND ONE ANOTHER

SCRIPTURE: DEUTERONOMY 34:1–12

Already but Not Yet

“I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there.”

Deuteronomy 34:4b

Moses could not enter the promised land. He poured himself out for many years in order to lead his people to the place filled with new possibilities. Nevertheless, he could not be there. Why? Was it his own fault, or was it on account of the obstinacy and disobedience that the Israelites had shown during the journey? The last chapter of Deuteronomy mentions that Moses’s relationship with God was remarkable and that what he did as God’s prophet was incomparable, without any conclusive comments about the reason.

“Already but not yet” is a phrase often used to indicate the theological nature of the coming kingdom of God. It has been already initiated but has not been completed yet. We are the people of God who yearn for and catch glimpses of the coming kingdom that is near but still arriving. In that sense, Moses can be a paradigm for all of us. We continue to hope, wait, serve, and love, looking toward God’s future that has come near but has not fully arrived.

God, we wait for your coming kingdom, working with you and for you. Amen.

Joon Ki Kim, New Glasgow, Nova Scotia

LOVE FOR GOD AND ONE ANOTHER

SCRIPTURE: DEUTERONOMY 34:1–12

Those Who Saw It but Could Not Enter It

*Then Moses, the servant of the LORD, died there
in the land of Moab, at the LORD's command.*

Deuteronomy 34:5

Throughout history, we can find the examples of those, like Moses, who could not enter the new era for which they had worked sacrificially. As a German pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) shared his strong solidarity with the Jews persecuted by the Nazi Party. Because of his resistance against Hitler's rule, he was imprisoned and executed in 1945, about five months before the end of the war.

A Korean poet, Yoon Dong Joo (1917–1945), resisted the oppression of the Japanese Empire in Korea on the basis of his Christian faith. One of his poems, titled "The Cross," portrays, through a temperate, poetic beauty, his aspiration to take up his cross in the imitation of Christ, who willingly yielded himself for others. Yoon was tortured and died in prison about six months before the end of the war. Many people could enter the beautiful land that those prophets had pointed to, even though they themselves could not. Through their lives, God revealed the light that the darkness could never overcome.



*God, help us to follow you until we come into your
resurrection. Amen.*

Joon Ki Kim, New Glasgow, Nova Scotia

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2020

LOVE FOR GOD AND ONE ANOTHER

SCRIPTURE: DEUTERONOMY 34:1–12

Hope for Future Generations

Joshua son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him.

Deuteronomy 34:9a

One night when I was serving as a chaplain for a Christian camp program in Nova Scotia, all the campers and staff got together for an outdoor worship. It was around 8 p.m., but the dusky sky was veiled by thick clouds. As it was very dark, the young campers took out their flashlights when we sang hymns, in order to make out the words on their hymnbooks. Witnessing this scene, I was inspired: the dark night could symbolize challenging times for God's church. But, regardless of how many, there will always be people who come out of the dark as God's remnant. They will seek out the legacy of faith that we leave, like the young campers trying to read their book of praise in the dark.

In spite of the hard challenges faced by churches today, we live faithfully in hope. The trace that we leave as God's people will help the next generations to understand how to go further than we did and help them to write new stories of God's imperishable life.

God, raise your people to work toward the world that is to come. Amen.

Joon Ki Kim, New Glasgow, Nova Scotia

LOVE FOR GOD AND ONE ANOTHER

SCRIPTURE: 1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-8

Not to Please People but to Please God

We have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, . . . not to please mortals, but to please God.

1 Thessalonians 2:4b

In cultures based on consumerism, a person's life is often valued by how much that person possesses and consumes. What about Christian ministry? What kind of frame of reference works in our minds when we look at the ministry of a person or a group of people?

Once I heard from a friend of mine that a church treasurer came up to his pastor and said, "Your ministry is going very well. How do I know? Our congregation's budget has increased." Others judge a pastor's ministry by the number of people who attend Sunday worship. It is important to remember that pastors (like all of us) are justified not by our achievements but by God's grace. Paul clarifies that the ministry to which he was called has nothing to do with attaining approval from others, and the point of ministry is not the benefits or privileges that can come along with recognition. Those who minister must learn to focus on God, who tests our hearts and asks for our honesty and faithfulness until the end.



God, may what we do as your people be focused on glorifying you and your reign. Amen.

Joon Ki Kim, New Glasgow, Nova Scotia

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2020

LOVE FOR GOD AND ONE ANOTHER

SCRIPTURE: 1 THESSALONIANS 2:1–8

Sharing Oneself Joyfully

We are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves.

1 Thessalonians 2:8b

Numerous commercial messages use flattery to entice customers or try to appeal to their sense of convenience, pleasure, or pride. Being bombarded with those messages, one may be persuaded to think that the most important subject is oneself—thinking of the self as the central focus of the world.

The work of child care is completely out of line with this self-centered perspective. It is a task that asks a person to use one's time, energy, and resources unsparingly in service of the life that grows little by little. When discussing pastoral care for the people in Thessalonica, Paul confesses that he and his coworkers must act like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. The basic principle of God's love is diametrically opposed to consumerism because those fully seized by divine love look past themselves toward others, sharing the good news with joy.



Transform our minds and hearts so that we may be the truthful witnesses of your astounding love. Amen.

Joon Ki Kim, New Glasgow, Nova Scotia

LOVE FOR GOD AND ONE ANOTHER

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 22:34–46

The Greatest Commandment

Love the Lord your God . . . love your neighbor.

Matthew 22:37–39

“Which commandment in the law is the greatest?” a lawyer asked Jesus, not to have a good discussion about God’s law but to try to trap Jesus. If Jesus had pointed to a specific commandment in his response, the lawyer would have said, “So you mean that the other commandments are not as important as this particular one? You do not truly respect all the teachings of Moses.” But Jesus answered the question in this way: “Yes, there is no commandment that can be dismissed. But two commandments, “love your God and love your neighbor,” reveal the central spirit of the whole Bible. These two teachings define what all the things in the Bible, in their depth, mean to you today.”

All the biblical discourses converge eventually to the most fundamental topic—the love of God and the love among all God’s children. The topic of love is the Alpha and Omega of the Bible and of God. Jesus says that our whole Christian life needs to be built on the same foundation.



*Help us to understand deeply your love for all people
and to spread it, O God. Amen.*

Joon Ki Kim, New Glasgow, Nova Scotia

LOVE FOR GOD AND ONE ANOTHER

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 22:34–46

Rejected Truth

*No one was able to give him an answer, nor . . .
did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.*

Matthew 22:46

After irrefutably responding to a series of trick questions from the religious leaders, Jesus asked his question of the Pharisees: “What do you think about the Christ; whose son is he?” They said, “the son of David.” It was a correct response, but their answer went no further. They did not elaborate by saying, “You are the son of David.” According to the genealogy, the Messiah was the son of David, but he was far more than that. Quoting Psalm 110, Jesus pointed out that David himself called the Messiah David’s Lord. None of them was able to use any counterargument. They became totally silent.

It was not that they did not understand these truthful statements from Jesus. They did not want to acknowledge them. The new world of God, the kingdom of God, which Jesus preached and embodied, could not be harmonized at all with the world of power and privilege that they preferred. They could not accept the loving Christ who lived and died for God’s truth and the salvation of many others.

*God, as your people, we long to know you deeply and
follow you faithfully, day by day. Amen.*

Joon Ki Kim, New Glasgow, Nova Scotia

PRACTICING FAITHFULNESS

SCRIPTURE: JOSHUA 3:7–17

Feet First

When the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan flowing from above shall be cut off.

Joshua 3:13

God's instructions in this passage are very specific: God is ordering the priests who are carrying the Ark of the Covenant to step into the Jordan River so that the soles of their feet are submerged. I love this! I love how there is no gray area here. God left no room for anyone to say, "Well, I'll stick one toe in. That will count." No, God is specific in instructing these priests: put both soles of both feet in the water, *and then* I will do what I will do. Both feet have to commit before God will move.

Scripture teaches us repeatedly that we need to commit, that lukewarm faith is a waste of time. Why is it still so hard, then? We live mired in the mud of the human condition, on the banks of the river we long to step into. Praise be to God that, with God's help, we can take the step we need to take! We can plunk both feet into the Jordan River and do our part in the ongoing, holy work of God.

*O God, give me the courage to step on in. Thank you!
Amen.*

Lindy Thompson, Franklin, Tennessee

MONDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2020

PRACTICING FAITHFULNESS

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 107:1–7

We Are It

*Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress;
he led them by a straight way,
until they reached an inhabited town.*

Psalm 107:6–7

People come to Christianity by many ways and means. I have been a Christian my whole life, and that presents challenges of which I have to be aware. For example, if I think generically of God delivering someone from distress, if I'm not careful I might think like a child, meaning I might picture a big wind moving a person literally from a dangerous place to a safe one, or a bolt of lightning destroying an enemy—something resembling a fairy story more than the movement of God. But look at the passage. How does God save these people from distress? By sending them to—wait for it—*other people!* To an inhabited town! In this Scripture, God delivers by delivering people to each other.

We really are the hands and feet of God, friends. God trusts us that much. With God's help, we can ease one another's distress.



*God, I want to be your hands and feet in this world.
Show me today how you want me to help your people.
Amen.*

Lindy Thompson, Franklin, Tennessee

PRACTICING FAITHFULNESS

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 107:33–37

The Promise of Transformation

*He turns a desert into pools of water,
a parched land into springs of water.*

Psalm 107:35

The writer of this psalm is making a big statement here. This individual is claiming that God will turn a desert (picture rolling sand dunes and cacti) into pools of water (picture an oasis with trees, ponds, and animals drinking), and a parched land (picture your unwatered yard in the dead of August) into springs of water (picture the same yard with springs of water bubbling out of the ground and children squealing as they splash in the puddles).

These are huge changes. One thing is becoming something entirely different; one reality is giving way to a new, completely transformed reality.

This is how God works. This is what God does. This is God's specialty: transforming, changing, drawing out the good, leading on to the new. God facilitates the emergence of something never before seen, bringing out and bringing forth.

This is the grace of God in our daily lives, in our relationships, in our communities, and in our world. Thanks be to God for this gift of grace!



O God, fulfill your promise of transformation in your world and in me. Amen.

Lindy Thompson, Franklin, Tennessee

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2020

PRACTICING FAITHFULNESS

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 43

Choose Hope

*Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help and my God.*

Psalm 43:5

Do you talk to yourself in your head too? For me, the running commentary never stops, and it's not always helpful. The tone of my inner monologue depends on what I have been reading or listening to lately. If I have been reading Scripture and listening to good teaching, I am more likely to be kind to myself or to give myself at least a helpful instructive word. But if I am in a phase of being short on time and long on stress, there is no telling what negative phrases will bounce around in there. I almost have to rescue myself from myself sometimes and purposefully fill my mind with the goodness of God instead of whatever happens to be replaying at the moment.

The psalmist is speaking to his own soul, seeking to discover the root of his unhappiness, and he reminds himself of the appropriate response—to once again place his hope in God. This was the solution for the psalmist, and it is the solution for us too.

God, when I struggle, remind me that my hope is in you. Amen.

Lindy Thompson, Franklin, Tennessee

PRACTICING FAITHFULNESS

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 23:1–12

Returning to Humility

*They do all their deeds to be seen by others. . . .
They love to have the place of honor at banquets
and the best seats in the synagogues, and to be
greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to
have people call them rabbi.*

Matthew 23:5–7

These verses hit many of us where we live, and they certainly speak to society at large. We receive so many messages communicating that the most important thing is to look good. Social media feeds right into this aspect of our humanity. We want the best parts of our lives to be seen by others so that they will think well of us.

Wanting to put our best foot forward and to make a good impression is not a bad thing in and of itself, but it can be a slippery slope. When we get too caught up in gaining the affirmation of others, we can lose the positive substance of our original goal. Jesus says, “All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.” Through the life of Jesus, God teaches us the value of serving others. If we want to be disciples, we will imitate Jesus and practice humility—no matter how many times we mess up and have to humbly begin again.

God, help me to focus on what you have said is important—serving others with humility. Amen.

Lindy Thompson, Franklin, Tennessee

PRACTICING FAITHFULNESS

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 34:1–8

Sing Anyway

*I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
let the humble hear and be glad.
O magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together.*

Psalm 34:1–3

How can I bless the Lord at all times? I already mentioned how I struggle with a constant inner monologue—how can I manage to praise God continually instead? God has provided an answer—music! Song! By singing, we can truly “bless the Lord at all times.”

This is where people begin to balk and bring up their subpar singing voices—but friends, this is not a performance. This is communication with God, who made and loves us. Singing is one of the best and quickest ways to get something into your head and keep it there, and hymns are wonderful vehicles for glorifying God. Any type of music will work—whatever speaks to you and is easy to remember. There is always “Jesus Loves Me”—because he does.

God’s gift to us of music and singing provides us with the perfect way to “exalt [God’s] name together!”

God, thank you for music. Please help me to sing a song of praise in my heart today. Amen.

Lindy Thompson, Franklin, Tennessee

PRACTICING FAITHFULNESS

SCRIPTURE: 1 JOHN 3:1–3

God's Child

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.

1 John 3:1

Throughout our lives, we are given names and titles and labels and identification numbers that are meant to tell us who and what we are. However, the most important aspect of our identity is stated plainly in this verse: we are children of God.

If we believe this, it is a life-changing statement. We no longer have to search for where we belong. We belong to God. We are God's children. God is our loving parent. God is where each of us started, and God is where we will end. We have our answer. We know to whom we belong.

There is nothing more important than this, and now that we know it, we are commissioned to go tell everybody. No one should live their lives not knowing to whom they belong.

The love of God encompasses all. May we, in every aspect of our living, share this love freely.



God, I am your child. Thank you for loving me. I love you too. Help me to share your love with everyone, all my life long. Amen.

Lindy Thompson, Franklin, Tennessee